

カピタネ!

魔王たちの断章

丈月城

Campione XVII



Illustration シコルスキー



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スーパーダッシュ

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piece of memories...



「ばああああー」

巨大なカマの神獣は
自由自在に地中を移動している



楽しい晩餐会がとんでも

ないことに……!?

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いみきー

ご愛読いただき
ありがとうございます
ございませ!!



Chapter 1 - The HimeMikos and the Seventh Campione

"The word Campione corresponds to the English word 'champion,'" said the black-haired girl—Seishuuin Ena.

Her carefree tone of voice was a clear expression of her cheerful personality.

"Just think of it as something like a king or a warrior. It's a name given by the Italians to set these people apart from ordinary humans, magi and users of spiritual powers."

"It does sound like a word from that language."

Mariya Hikari nodded and concurred.

Ena, the one explaining, was aged sixteen whereas the audience, Hikari, was a twelve-year-old sixth grader. With a slight gap in age, there was seniority relationship between them.

They were known as "HimeMikos," special users of spiritual powers dating back to ancient Japan.

Hikari's elder sister was also a HimeMiko and had a close relationship with Ena. This was why Ena, known as the "HimeMiko of the Sword," could casually visit the Mariya residence as she pleased.

Tonight, she had suddenly shown up, saying "let me stay for a night" with a smile.

This was a day when their parents were returning home late and Hikari's elder was about to prepare dinner. The elder sister greeted the sudden guest with a smile and instructed her younger sister: "Hikari, please keep Ena-san company until dinner is prepared."

That was what happened.

The elder sister—Mariya Yuri—was a kindhearted and elegant young lady whose refined airs far surpassed that of the younger sister in the same household.

(However, she's more than just a gentle lady. As her sister, I know that very well.)

This elder sister was unbelievably good friends with the lively and cheerful Ena despite their contrasting personalities.

Hikari loved both older girls very much. Hence, she was quite happy to keep Ena-neesama company.

While chatting, Hikari suddenly asked a question.

What kind of people were the so-called Campiones? What kind of person was the one causing commotions near the Mariya residence in the past few months—More specifically, around her elder sister.

"But Ena-neesama, Campiones, these great godslayers, exist outside of Italy as well, right?"

As a HimeMiko in training, Hikari used polite language to refer to the Campiones.

Ever since she was young, she had been educated that they were conquerors, sovereigns and Devil Kings.

Campione was the word referring to slayers of *gods*, superhumans who had usurped divine authorities. They were holders of powers to oppose gods. They were kings who had transcended human boundaries.

"Yes. Although there have been who knows how many dozens of them if counting from ancient times, they were born in countries all over the world and civilizations in various places. There have been centuries when not a single one came into existence and times like the present when a number of kings vie for supremacy."

Ena prattled on and on.

"Of course, they were born in the East as well as the West. There were apparently cases arising in America and the Pacific islands too."

In fact, Seishuuin Ena surpassed the Mariya sisters on being a well-bred young lady.

Her ancestor was even born in a prestigious daimyo family from the Warring States period. Although it was hard to imagine from her upfront style of behavior, Ena was actually a very educated girl well-versed in all kinds of traditional arts.

"A godslayer was recently born in Japan, apparently. But actually, it might not be surprising for Japanese godslayers to have existed historically, except that there are no records. In fact, there are records of Devil Kings crossing the ocean."

The Chinese literary culture sphere, which includes Japan, had recorded Campiones since ancient times as Rakshasa Kings, Devil Kings, *etc.* Naturally, these were codes used in secret between those in the know.

"It was roughly two hundred years ago when an Italian mage wrote the first book about Campiones."

"A book!?"

"Yes. Hence, the decision was made to call them Campiones. They are such terrifying characters who must not be disobeyed under any circumstances—Something like that."

Ena recounted while making a look as though recalling poignant memories about an acquaintance.

"What did it say? Serving at a Campione's side for decades, he slaved away laboriously at his lord's beck and call. Seizing the chance when his lord had died in battle somewhere, he wrote everything he knew into a book or something. His aim was to sound an alarm for the world."

"Slaved away?"

"Because Campiones are ridiculous people. Although Ena finds them very interesting, ordinary people can't run away fast enough."

Hikari felt troubled.

Seishuuin Ena was known as the unprecedented premier HimeMiko. And yet

she called these Campiones ridiculous characters. They were extraordinary people who even killed gods.

Sure enough, serving these kinds of people must be extraordinarily tough.

Reportedly, there were a total of seven Campiones in the present world. Hikari recalled their names.

Summoning storms, the wolf king of the Balkans, Marquis Dejanstahl Voban.

China's strongest martial hero sovereign, the most powerful Daoist priestess with full mastery over Chinese magic, Her Eminence Luo Hao.

The mysterious queen of caves, Madame Aisha.

The nobleman of divine speed, adept in stratagems and exploration, Black Prince Alec.

The masked hero with five different metamorphoses, John Pluto Smith.

The King of Swords possessing a trenchant blade to slice through all creation and a body of steel, Salvatore Doni.

And the youngest of the seven, the first godslayer born in Japan, Kusanagi Godou!

"S-Serving that kind of person, I guess Onee-chan really has things tough after all!?"

Several months earlier, her elder sister, Mariya Yuri, had become Kusanagi Godou's helper.

However, what kind of work did it specifically entail?

Since the elder sister did not talk about it on her own, Hikari had no idea even now.

Furthermore, all sorts of rumors had reached her as a HimeMiko in training. Such hearsay of indeterminate truth further stimulated her unease.

"Well, although King Kusanagi is a nice person, he is a Campione after all."

"K-Kusanagi-sama is still a high school student, right?"

"Yeah, that's right. He's the same age as Yuri and Ena. First year of high

school."

"Apart from Onee-chan, he has attendants from Italy, right?"

"Yes. Well-versed in swordsmanship and magic like Ena, these two magi serve him at his side from day to day. Yeah, they're called Templar Knights."

Ena answered Hikar's questions clearly.

Templar Knights. They were wielders of special powers dating from medieval Europe who were both knights and magi. It was said that their descendants established magic associations in Europe and were still active in the present day.

Recalling this knowledge, Hikari nodded firmly.

"One of them is Erica-san. Not only a powerful fighter but also extremely smart. The other is Liliana-san, who's a witch in addition to being a knight. Purely in terms of magic, Erica-san is probably slightly stronger."

"...Th-Then is this really true!?"

Hikari leaned forward, planning to ask a question that had troubled her for a long time.

"Onee-chan and those two—Are the three of them Kusanagi-sama's 'lovers'!?"

This was an unbelievable rumor.

No, seeing as he was one of the Devil King Campiones after all, ordinary morals were worthless before them. Doing something of this level would not be ridiculous.

But to think her elder sister Yuri was the *Devil King's lover*...

To the younger sister, this was impossible to believe.

The elder sister was raised as a sheltered young lady with almost no experience in male intimacy. Although there was contact with older men as part of her job as a HimeMiko, it was purely work-related.

Conscientious and noble-minded, the very image of a Yamato Nadeshiko, to think her elder sister would—

Nevertheless, in the past few months, Hikari had heard many rumors about her elder sister, Mariya Yuri, becoming the lover of Kusanagi Godou the Campione.

She had tried asking her sister directly.

"G-Godou-san and I are just ordinary friends."

She always looked down and denied.

However, her face at the time always went red during her denial.

That was not anger but clearly blushing from embarrassment. Furthermore, it was quite shocking for her elder sister to address a boy directly by first name.

She looked a bit happy when speaking that name—That could not be more obvious.

"Wrong, wrong. It's not three lovers."

"R-Really? I knew it couldn't be true."

Hearing Ena refute the notion so simply, Hikari felt relieved. However, Ena's next sentence turned the whole world upside down.

"Ena became His Majesty's woman recently too. So four is the right number."

"EHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!?"

Incomparably shocking news. Hikari could not help but scream.

"E-E-E-Ena-neesama joined in too!?"

"It's a long story but that's pretty much it. Oh, but don't worry. Ena asked His Majesty to prioritize Yuri for stuff like having babies that are part of a woman's job."

"B-Babies!?"

"Because this kind of thing needs more consideration."

"B-B-But, Onee-chan is only in the first year of high school!"

"Right. Already sixteen, so she can get married. But His Majesty hasn't reached eighteen yet, so they can't marry immediately. Oh, but laws don't apply to Campiones, so there's nothing to worry about."

In ancient times, fifteen or so would be considered adult, Ena mentioned in amusement.

Judging from her tone of voice, Hikari understood it was not a joke. Her sister

Yuri and Seishu Ena both shared an extraordinary relationship with the Campione named Kusanagi Godou!

"Then Kusanagi might possibly become my brother-in-law in the future..."

"Not possibly but absolutely definitely. Although it's unclear who will become the official wife. After all, His Majesty won't irresponsibly abandon Yuri and Ena."

Secretly confident, Ena asserted.

"He's definitely like that. Unable to be open about those whose hearts are connected to him, he's excessively righteous and loves looking for trouble. What could one say? King Kusanagi is probably someone very generous but with flaws."

With feelings of love and affection, Ena subtly criticized Kusanagi Godou's character.

Seeing Ena acting this way for the first time, Hikari felt surprised from the bottom of her heart.

The HimeMiko of the Sword, Seishu Ena. Capable of wielding the exceptional spirit power of [Divine Possession], she was a rare talent unique in the world. In order to hone this ability, Ena frequently went deep into the mountains to cleanse her body and mind in nature.

Precisely because of that, she was quite animal-like in character.

Prioritizing sensibility over sense, she based her judgment more on intuition than logic.

But conversely, this was what enabled her to sniff out the true nature of someone she had only met recently.

Knowing this aspect of Ena's quite well, Hikari nodded deeply.

"I thought a godslaying Devil King would be someone more scary..."

"Fufu, if you run into any trouble, try asking His Majesty for advice. He'll definitely think seriously to find a solution for you."

"Really!?"

"You've got something? Then Ena can discuss with you too. Care to share?"

"Oh okay. In that case, let's do that after dinner. But after hearing all this, I'm getting worried about something else."

"Eh, what is it?"

"My sister is serving Kusanagi-sama as his lover, right? But Onee-chan is not someone used to dealing with men, will things really be okay...?"

Hearing what Hikari was worried about, Ena chuckled.

"Oh... Well, the situation is not too favorable if compared to Erica-san, but Yuri is already doing great."

"Eh, you're talking about Onee-chan here!?"

"Yes. Although Ena isn't very used to interacting with boys either, it's quite surprising to be overtaken by Yuri in those things."

"Th-Those things!?"

Hikari wondered while her own heart pounded.

In her interactions with Kusanagi Godou, this member of the opposite sex, the serious elder sister had apparently surpassed the bold and fearless Ena. What specifically did "those things" mean anyway?

No matter what, she must find out!

"E-Ena-san, what on earth are you two talking about!? Please do not put strange ideas into Hikari's head!"

Suddenly appearing, the elder sister, Mariya Yuri, discovered them.

She had probably come over from the kitchen to have a look because Hikari and Ena were speaking too loudly.

It was rare for the elder sister, who always behaved so gently, to raise her voice.

Turned bright red in embarrassment, she looked quite frantic.

Sure enough, this was a crucial matter of a lifetime to the elder sister. Hikari nodded her head while timidly raising a counterargument.

"No, but since he's not an ordinary person, it's better for the entire family to be clear on the situation and prepared themselves mentally. Hey Onee-chan, there might be all sorts of problems in family relationships when you have your official wedding."



The Mariya family's eldest daughter becoming the legal wife of the Devil King Campione. Or bearing his child.

The Mariya family did not have enough "clout" to serve as Yuri's support if these developments were to come true. However.

"You don't need to worry about that. When the time comes, just use the name of Seishuuin."

Ena immediately chimed in.

"If other clans have any objections, Ena's family will think of a way to deal with it. There's also the solution of adopting Yuri into the Seishuuin family. Kaoru-san of the Sayanomiya family is also an expert in these matters, so there shouldn't be a problem."

The Sayanomiya family was renowned in the wizardry world alongside the Seishuuin family. Hikari widened her eyes.

With both families backing the elder sister, Yuri, she would be able to build an intimate relationship with the godslaying Devil King!

"So, I guess I have an 'Onii-sama' now..."

"Isn't that right, Yuri? You're no longer ordinary friends with His Majesty, right?"

Hikari murmured and Ena asked.

Seeing her sister and her friend's reaction, the HimeMiko, Mariya Yuri said:

"A-Although that may be true...! In any case, it is too early. Godou-san and I are still in high school and are not of age yet. I-I am going back to preparing dinner!"

Frantic, head lowered, as though avoiding eye contact, she fled. Her feelings of embarrassment must have won over the urge to scold.

"Maybe Ena said a bit too much..."

Probably a bit embarrassed, Ena also stood up with an obedient look on her face that was rare to see.

Then she went into the corridor to chase Yuri. On the other hand, having

learned about the existence of the brother-in-law she had never met, Hikari made a certain decision.

"Onee-chan and Ena-neesama's husband... I must meet him!"

This determination would become a trigger that swept the Campione, Kusanagi Godou, into a commotion, but that would be yet another story.

As a side note...

If the person in question, Kusanagi Godou, were to hear what Ena said at the time, surely he would scream and yell on the spot: "Don't describe me as the kind of guy who falls in love with every girl he meets! Neither Erica, Mariya nor Liliana is my lover. Besides, Seishuun, I don't recall you becoming my lover at all!"

Etc etc.

Objectively speaking, what both sides said approached the truth. Also, suppose the girls close to him were to hear such words from him...

Erica Blandelli would grumble sardonically, "Saying something like that at this juncture would be quite an expression of his abnormality" whereas Liliana Kranjcar would criticize seriously: "As expected, he has no self-awareness whatsoever in matters concerning the fairer sex."

Furthermore, Mariya Yuri would not argue against what Godou said, but perhaps lower her gaze and organize her thoughts and feelings internally.

If Godou were to see her reacting like that, he might frantically blurt out "N-No, I guess it's actually quite different from ordinary friends..."

All of the above are hypothetical situations.

Chapter 2 - The King's Dinner Party

The great decisive match took place on the stage of the Sea of Bousou.

An intense confrontation between the goddess Athena, the war god Lancelot and the Campione Kusanagi Godou.

On that occasion, Seishu Ena valiantly fought alone and exhausted herself severely in mind and body.

Consequently, she was forcibly commanded to recuperate and stay obediently at the Seishu ancestral home in Chichibu.

Shut at home, recuperation had gone on for the past half a month. Once she obtained a doctor's authorization, she spent another half a month or so staying in the famous sacred site of the two divine mountains of Chichibu, to let the spiritual presence cleanse her body and mind.

As a result, as soon as she recovered, Ena descended from the mountains and headed towards the great metropolis, Tokyo, a place completely opposite to serenity and purity.

"I hate having to spend almost half a month at home pretending to be obedient... So bored I was about to die..."

The current location was the living room of a western mansion built during the Taisho period, located in Area 3 of the Chiyoda ward.

Overcome with all sorts of emotions, Ena exclaimed emphatically.

To an unfettered child of nature like her, this sort of temporary imposed recuperation was as unbearable as encountering "Rest for Twenty Rounds" when playing Game of Life.

"Finally I was able to come back... But anyway, Yuri and Liliana-san are really too sly."

Ena, whose personality was as straight as an arrow, was gazing at her friends with a slight sense of reproach.

"What do you mean, Seishuuin Ena?"

"Sly... On what grounds?"

Liliana Kranjcar asked with an expression of surprise while Mariya Yuri gracefully tilted her head in puzzlement.

Back in Tokyo once again, Ena had called them to the Sayanomiya residence to make a certain request.

This ancient and spacious western mansion was the possession of the HimeMiko and Ena's childhood friend.

"Because, weren't things so busy and exciting while Ena was away? Everyone visited London, and fought with a god. I felt so jealous after hearing about it. Only Ena was left out. That's so not fun."

Ena was throwing a tantrum like a little child.

"Busy and exciting, eh..."

"You felt jealous, eh..."

A shadow of doubt enshrouded Yuri and Liliana's faces at the same time.

"I think the vast majority would not feel excited during that time. The only exceptions were probably Kusanagi Godou, as well as Alec -- Alexandre Gascoigne-sama."

The people Liliana named were their own king and England's young king. Her facial expression was a mixture of the worry over the series of commotions caused by the two Devil Kings combined with her self-reproach for failing to stop them.

"Those two were really too reckless... In the end, they even caused such calamity to befall Yokohama Bay Bridge."

Yuri bowed her head as if ashamed and shuddered.

Due to being deeply involved in the incident -- she must have been embarrassed for "participating" in the occurrence.

Nevertheless, Ena was jealous of them instead.

The news headlines reported that the Yokohama Bay Bridge underwent "An Unprecedented Accidental Collapse!"

Ena only found out after returning from the mountains, and as soon as she was informed of the truth, she slapped her thigh as if she suddenly realized.

As expected of His Majesty! Clearly if he had summoned Ena to help out, she could have raised hell as well!

"Hey hey, that time when His Majesty was affected by some strange curse, he became quite amazing, right? Basically, he's always been quite reckless but it feels like his destructive power went up a notch?"

" "....." "

"I've read the report, yes. But Yuri and Liliana-san, neither of you told me a single detail even though you were participants right there on the scene. I have no clue as to how amazing His Majesty was or in what manner. Could you take some pity on poor little injured Ena and tell me properly?"

"D...Denied! No matter what... This is too early for Seishuuin Ena to know!"

"A-Agreed. Furthermore, this concerns Godou-san's privacy after all. I believe it should not be probed so casually!"

For some reason, Liliana and Yuri's faces had become red with embarrassment as they instantly expressed rejection.

"Eh. You two are so stingy."

Ena pouted once again.

However, this was the characteristic of the lively, energetic, unfettered and open-minded Seishuuin Ena. She would not tactlessly pursue matters with people who disliked it. This was as far as she would ask here. That left asking Erica Blandelli, as well as the most involved participant, Kusanagi Godou himself.

"I guess I'd better ask His Majesty directly later?"

"...Possibly. But Kusanagi Godou will probably feel very embarrassed."

"...Having learnt a little lesson, hopefully he could act a little more cautiously

from now on."

As Ena murmured softly, Liliana nodded and Yuri began to pray.

Regardless, this was an incident that Kusanagi Godou would find difficult to talk about.

How interesting. No matter what, she must get at the truth. Ena resolved herself.

"By the way, the reason I asked both of you out today, is to discuss something."

"Oh."

"If I may be of help, of course I would be glad to do so... But would Erica-san not be a better choice?"

Erica Blandelli was greatly gifted with clarity of mind.

She was also capable of caring after others like an open-minded salon mistress, and was unexpectedly diplomatic in her social interactions. Indeed it was as Yuri suggested, she was a most suitable candidate for seeking counsel.

But at this time, Liliana spoke up.

"Erica said she had some business and already left Tokyo yesterday. Furthermore, I believe it is best not to display too many of one's personal weaknesses to that woman... As much as I hate to admit it, suitably accepting Erica's advice is indeed beneficial. However, after who knows how many years, when she makes use of such knowledge as bargaining chips for deals or threats, it becomes kind of..."

Perhaps recalling her personal experiences, Liliana's speech gradually trailed off vaguely.

Oh well, because from Erica's perspective, Liliana was her closest friend who she interacted without any reservations. Hence, she was able to tease and make fun of her to no end. Ena spoke decisively: "Actually Ena had no intention of seeking Erica-san in the first place. No matter what, this is a challenge that is equivalent to admitting 'inferiority' towards Erica-san. If I sought help from her, it would be a mess."

"So, it is about Erica-san?"

"Yes. That is why I prepared this thing."

As Yuri questioned in surprise, Ena confirmed and took out her new "partner."

It was a short blade. The cutting edge was carefully wrapped in white cloth. Ena unwrapped it in order to display her beloved blade's form to her friends.



A thick and wide hamaguri-ba^[1] blade, its sharp edge displayed slight curvature.

"It looks rather sharp."

"As expected of Liliana-san, you have good eyes! This thing here, was forged by the swordsmith's workshop near my home using the Doutanuki^[2] sword I took down from a wall at home. It was only being used as decoration anyway."

"Dou -- tanuki?"

As expected of one born and raised in Milan. The reference to the maker's name, Doutanuki Masakuni, was lost upon Liliana.

But given Ena's explanation, Liliana deduced easily enough.

"In any case, you mean that you took an ancient Japanese sword that was originally much longer, and reforged it into its current size!?"

"Eh, Ena-san, I know almost nothing of swords."

On the other hand, Yuri looked quite worried as she spoke.

"But is this not an extremely precious artifact? A work of artistry on the level of an important cultural asset..."

Japanese swords were branded at the bottom part of the blade itself.

In the reforging process, naturally there was no choice but to sever off that portion of the blade. Without the maker's inscription, the value of a Japanese sword as a work of art was naturally lost.

"It's not really an artifact of that level... Though the swordsmith who handled my reforging request was crying rivers. In any case, it's just something collecting dust in Ena's home."

Located at Chichibu, the Seishuuin ancestral residence stored many spears, bows, swords, armor and various armaments.

Due to being blood-related to the Seiwa Genji^[3] family of generals, the Seishuuin held vast collections of that nature. Normally, there would be no use for them other than artistic admiration in the current peaceful Heisei era. Nevertheless, Ena had taken them out for "practical" use many times.

"Practical use is the most important thing for tools."

"Still, there should be limits to wasting things."

As Liliana sighed, Ena replied, completely unfazed:

"Nothing of that sort. --In actual fact, Ena was trying all sorts of new things during the leisure of recuperation. Like asking swordsmiths to make blades using the principles of forging Japanese swords, or trying those convenient ceramic ones that don't rust. However, none of them were sharp enough, so in the end I had this one made."

Ena gazed at her "beloved blade," mesmerized.

Doutanuki blades were known for their unrefined construction which prioritized "practicality" over glamorous appearances. It was a blade embodying the beauty of robust functionality.

"Ceramic?"

Yuri's pretty eyes stared wide in surprise.

"Umm... You sound like you are talking about kitchen knives."

"Yes yes, that's the one. After reaching a draw in the cooking contest against Erica-san last time, Ena thinks it's time to improve her cooking level. So, I was thinking I should invest in tools first. It's really great that I found something suitable at home."

"In other words, that thing is not a weapon but a tool for cooking -- just an ordinary kitchen knife?"

"Yes."

Ena nodded in response to Liliana's question.

Then she took the short blade in question... Or rather, the kitchen knife and swung it.

Furthermore, this was a peerless masterpiece, the beloved blade of the "HimeMiko of the Sword" Seishuun Ena, forged for the purpose of slicing all cooking ingredients cleanly in half.

Staring at that blade of simplicity and fortitude, Yuri and Liliana sighed

simultaneously.

"In other words, this is something that cannot be bought simply with money. What would the going price be in the collector's market...?"

"I am guessing millions of yen at least..."

"So, now that the tool is ready, next comes the teachers, right? If you two are willing, please teach Ena all sorts of knowledge."

Ena knew very well that as a fellow model Yamato Nadeshiko, Yuri was a culinary master.

She had also heard of Liliana's substantial accomplishments in this area. Hence, Ena clapped her hands together before them and pleaded again.

"Please, this is my request of a lifetime!"

"Well, in that case... There is no particular reason to refuse."

"Same here. So how about we all try some cooking together this time?"

Liliana agreed readily and Yuri smiled calmly in agreement.

"Then we will teach you all sorts of things then, how about that?"

"Really!? Thank you so much! Ah, if there's no trouble, can we do it today? After all, strike while the iron is hot. Let's call His Majesty over later and let him try our cooking, how's that?"

"Immediately? --I do not really mind--But it is rather sudden."

Liliana stared wide. Ena decided to explain the situation.

"The night before I came to Tokyo, I met an acquaintance in the mountains who's a hunter. After being told that Ena was learning to cook, he said 'I've got some great ingredients' and shared a lot with me. So I had it couriered here to treat His Majesty and everyone else."

"Great ingredients?"

"Yes. High-class choice ingredients. Very rare."

"From the mountain... Some wild fowl or the sort?"

"Or perhaps wild mushrooms and vegetables?"

Clearly, Yuri and Liliana underestimated the mountains.

Ena smiled proudly and said:

"Those things are not rare at all. It's a female black bear, over two metres tall. Over the past few days, it was prowling around the Saitama and Gunma boundary, roaming across villages. I heard mister hunter say he spent a great deal of effort to kill it."

"...A bear?"

"...That is what you mean by high-class choice ingredients?"

"Yes. If it's cooked well it should be really tasty, that's what the guy said. Ena could only think of pot-stewed bear, but are there better ways to cook it?"

However, the two culinary masters were taken aback.

"S-Sorry. I have never cooked bear before..."

"Same here... Speaking of which, I have never eaten it either. What about you, Seishuun Ena? If you frequent the mountains so much, you should have that kind of experience, right?"

"Unfortunately, no. Not even once."

Ena trained in the mountains for the purpose of purifying her body. Hence she was often performing religious abstinence.

Let alone fish, meat or any animal protein, even vegetables belonging to the onion or garlic families were prohibited, going as far as to abstain from grain crops. While training, she had trapped Iwana mountain trout and rabbits to eat before, but she never tried catching large beasts for this purpose.

"I see. Because while I was recuperating, His Majesty called me a few times to express sympathy, so I want to treat him as thanks. Black bear, what should we do with it..."

Muttering to herself, Ena folded her arms.

"Kusanagi-san did that? Then Ena-san would not be bored."

Yuri smiled as she said.

"Something like that. His Majesty gave me a call every couple days, chatting for

thirty minutes or an hour or so about nothing particularly important. But for the half month I was stuck at home, that's the only happy thing to happen. Thanks to that, I gradually thought recuperation wasn't too bad after all."

"I see. To think that Kusanagi Godou would be so diligently attentive depending on the circumstances..."

On the other hand, Liliana was slightly envious.

"...I have never received any call from Kusanagi Godou except regarding official business. Chatting of a personal nature has never occurred even once."

"...Come to think of it, me neither."

Yuri also spoke with a sighing expression.

"However, given that he is neither completely reticent nor particularly talkative, it is acceptable that he does not call without purpose. Still, knowing that he can express this kind of care, it does make one feel like wanting to get deeper into things."

"Of course, doing that much for Ena-san whose health was in bad condition, can be considered an exceptional show of care. It would not be reasonable to complain about this point."

Hearing Liliana's sighing words, Yuri also lowered her gaze, slightly gloomy.

Unsure why the conversation was heading into a strange direction, Ena stared wide in puzzlement.

"However, regarding the fact that he 'only' showed Ena-san such care, I do feel slightly resentful..."

"Right, only slightly."

"Correct, only just a slight amount."

Reaching this conclusion, Yuri and Liliana nodded at the same time.

Next, Yuri slowly turned to Ena, a smile on her face.

It was a smile of classic elegance, like a crescent moon that illuminated the dark sky with exceptional brightness on a cold winter's night. Most likely, this was the sort of smile displayed whenever the beautiful queen of the moon was

suddenly inspired by mischief.

"About the matter Ena-san proposed just now, I want to take good care of it."

"Eh? Which matter?"

"Regarding tonight, inviting Godou-san over and everyone having dinner together."

"That's not really much of a request... So what should we do with the black bear? Yuri, you've never cooked it before, right?"

"What? That poses no problem at all."

Liliana spoke with an extremely generous tone of voice.

"Did you not say so yourself, if you stew it in a pot, the meat basically becomes edible. No matter what manner of cooking, as long as the meat is no longer raw, there should be no problem... By the way, concerning Erica's maid's unique skills in this regard, I have heard rumors before."

"You mean Arianna-san, right? Speaking of which, indeed I have experienced her 'otherworldly' talent... Well then, let us invite her as well."

Yuri instantly proposed her idea and Liliana nodded vigorously.

"Wonderful idea. If I ask my maid Karen, she should be able to tell me her cellphone number. Seishuuin Ena, we will let you handle communications with Kusanagi Godou."

"Uh yeah. Got it."

Although things developed in a completely unexpected manner, the result still ended up as Ena had hoped.

If Kusanagi Godou came, she could also ask him about what happened with the war god Lancelot. Ena delightfully took out her cellphone but sighed at the discovery of the lack of battery power. She began searching her bag for the charger.

"I think things could be slightly more relaxing."

Kusanagi Godou declared solemnly.

The location was Akihabara, at a VIP room of the "Peerless Statesman" maid tea house run by Hong Kong's Lu family.

Godou and his young friend, the adopted "nephew" Lu Yinghua, as well as the History Compilation Committee special agent Amakasu Touma were gathered together.

"What do you mean slightly more relaxing? Isn't this extremely relaxing and leisurely already?"

Amakasu spoke with frivolous airs. He was still dressed in his usual creased and sloppy suit.

"Recently, the painful memories of smashing the Bay Bridge are still vivid."

"Hmm, well, that's true. But once in a while I get this kind of notion. Even for a month, no, only a week, if only I could travel the world without being accompanied by any of the girls I know, then my body and my mind would get some proper rest."

Amakasu was roughly twenty-seven or eight years old. Since he was senior in age, Godou naturally replied respectfully:

"Until my middle school graduation, my circle of close friends had boys outnumbering girls by a ratio of nine to one. Clearly that used to be the situation, but somehow I became surrounded by girls now..."

Even though this was perhaps a rather enviable position in others' view, that was what Godou truly felt.

Ah yes, it was definitely more relaxing in the past--

"I understand. I used to think that all the time as well."

The one who expressed agreement was the misogynist, Lu Yinghua. He was the direct disciple of Godou's "sworn elder sister," the demonic cult leader, Luo Cuilian.

Despite being a slender, dignified and handsome youth, he was an eccentric who treated "females" harshly no matter what.

"I became Master's disciple when I was around four or five years old. Thereafter, I spent about six years alone with Master at the Mount Lu convent

to go through forced training -- rather, to train with great enthusiasm."

The arrogant prodigy spoke with a sense of mournfulness.

"Well, the only non-relative and female in my world is Luo Cuilian. Recalling her abuses -- rather, training and innumerable unreasonable demands, I feel a heavy sensation in my stomach."

"Ah... She is that kind of person after all."

"Living with a man-eating lion would probably be far happier and relaxing in comparison..."

Godou expressed sympathy as Amakasu muttered knowingly.

As a side note, Amakasu's boss was the silver-tongued womanizer, the cross-dressing beauty, Sayanomiya Kaoru(♀). Perhaps the three fellow males gathered here were all victims fated to suffer at the hands of women.

Just at this moment, Godou's cellphone began ringing with a lively tone.

Taking it out, he discovered it was a call from Seishu Ena.

"Hello? Ah, it's been a while. You came over? Eh, dinner with everyone? Later tonight... Wait a minute, Seishu, what was that again? Bear, is that right? If I'm not mistaken, the main theme will be black bear meat..."

Conversing with Ena over the phone, Godou accepted the dinner invitation.

Listening on the side, Lu Yinghua and Amakasu whispered privately to each other.

"In Chinese cuisine, isn't that a high-class ingredient?"

"Ah yes, the bear's paw. Said to be a rare delicacy, but other than that, there's a whole host of tasty dishes. By the way, doesn't Japan sell canned bear meat?"

"Canned curry bear. Bear meat has a distinctive flavor, so it's a delicacy limited to Hokkaido."

On the other hand, Godou was just about to hang up the phone.

"Then let's meet at seven tonight. Yeah, see you later... It became like this again, I'll be there for sure."

Godou hung up as he spoke.

"For some reason, Mariya and Liliana are apparently there together with Seishuun. --By the way, Amakasu-san, would you like to go?"

"Unfortunately, I have work to do later."

Clearly slacking off at the maid tea house, the special agent replied calmly with a smile.

"What about you, Yinghua?"

"I would prefer to decline, Honored Uncle. You can't be suggesting that I spend my time at a place full of women, right?"

"That's true."

"Of course, if you say you need me to make a sacrifice, I will see things through to the utter end even if it meant wading through rivers of blood in purgatory on earth. If you have any need of my assistance, please feel free to ask."

"N-No need to go that far. I'm sorry for asking something strange."

Godou smiled wryly and left his seat, leaving the VIP room of the maid tea house.

Watching him leave, the remaining two exchanged glances.

"...Looks like it will turn out to be a most dangerous dinner gathering, I smell sparks in the air."

Rather than surprised, Amakasu muttered with an impressed tone of voice.

"A wise man would make up a plausible excuse and run like hell."

"What is going to happen? Who knows if notions of upright character, manners, thoughtfulness or the like are what secretly upholds Honored Uncle's supremacy."

"I believe he clearly could have avoided digging his own grave!"

As a side note, the person in question was completely oblivious to his impending doom.

On this very night, Kusanagi Godou was cornered in various ways, imprisoned

in the sufferings of a desperate plight. However, seeing as they were not omniscient gods, these two naturally had no way of knowing the details.

Chapter 3 - Campione and Study Meeting

Kusanagi Godou was a Devil King who had slain a god.

Also known as a Campione, existences feared by many for the trouble they brought.

However, above being a great Devil King, Godou was first and foremost a high school student.

Even though his everyday life was often embroiled in conflicts between gods and Devil Kings, he was still convinced that a student's responsibilities should be fulfilled to the best of his ability.

A student's responsibilities. Namely, studying.

"Due to the commotion caused by Gascoigne and Lancelot, my exam revision didn't make any progress at all."

On the very last day of November, Godou grumbled with a pained expression.

The second school term was coming to an end. In Jounan Academy's high school division, end of term examinations were scheduled during the first week of December. Nevertheless, Godou had been exceptionally busy lately.

First there was the school festival. Next came Athena's second invasion. Then there was Divine Ancestor Guinevere scheming behind the scenes.

Furthermore, there was the incident of Alexandre Gascoigne stealing the Heavenly Reverse Halberd.

After travelling all the way to England in search of him, Godou could not have expected the floating island commotion happening in Tokyo Bay. In addition, there was the deadly duel against Lancelot, the war god of the lance...

The natural result was the neglect of his studies.

In terms of preparedness for his end of term exams, Godou's condition was the furthest thing away from being ready.

"This may be starting a bit late, but surely I must put forth my full effort into studying."

Fully determined, Godou declared as if making an oath. This caused Erica to laugh beside him as if disparaging his resolve.

This happened to be a lunch break with fair weather when "the usual faces," Godou, Erica, Yuri and Liliana were gathered in the courtyard, having lunch.

"By this point, it's not like putting in effort is your only choice, right? Given Godou's situation, your academic results will not have much bearing on your future life."

"Come on... I have no wish to leave behind unpleasant high school memories like failing or being kept back a grade."

More than that, he had no intention of writing down "Devil King" as his profession either.

However, Erica continued to smile with delight.

"No problem. Godou, if you believe that graduating in Japanese schools will be hard, then come over to study abroad in Europe and aim for the universities there afterwards. There are quite a number of schools that collaborate with the [Copper Black Cross]. It can be arranged for you any time."

"Even now, I have no intention of moving abroad."

"Then how about I assist you with [Instruction] magic? That will basically allow you to memorize all the textbooks easily, right?"

"It's not like I'm fighting a god, I can't cheat like that!"

Refusing the devil's proposal, Godou turned to his other companions.

"Everyone else's grades are so good. Looks like you won't be having any problems with the upcoming exams?"

"I should not have any problems with any basic education or humanities subjects..."

Liliana replied with a gloomy expression.

"But I am not very talented at mathematics and the sort of subject known as physics. Even though I try to study it whenever I have time, I cannot say I am making much progress..."

I see, so Liliana was the kind of person completely disposed towards the humanities. Godou nodded.

In a certain sense, Godou believed this disposition was rather fitting for a "witch" living in the world of magic and fantasy.

"Erica and Liliana's knowledge of history and related subjects is especially detailed."

Let alone history and archaeology, these unusual teenaged girls were even knowledgeable in comparative cultural studies.

Furthermore, they even did well in Japanese language subjects like modern literature, ancient literature and annotated literary Chinese. It was as if they were trying to put to shame the other students in the class whose mother tongue was Japanese.

"But Erica, you too have subjects you are not good at, right? Are you properly prepared?"

"That is a stupid question, you know, Lily."

Erica smiled mischievously in response to Liliana's question.

"You are talking about me, Erica Blandelli, here. Even though I can devote any amount of time to research things I find interesting... I have no intention of wasting any leisure on trying to find positive meaning in those inorganic symbols and mathematical formulae."

"Ah... In other words, you haven't done anything."

"Yes. No matter what grades my examinations end up being, nothing should affect me as a person. Letting nature take its course is fine with me."

Erica responded to Godou's mutterings with effortless composure.

The strength of this unshakable ego, could it be considered enlightenment? Or

rather, one should describe it as impressive egocentrism.

"Ah, speaking of which. Mariya spent a lot of time investigating Lancelot. Even though I am sorry for asking this late, will it affect your studying for exams?"

Recalling that, Godou instantly apologized.

In order to seek the origins of the mysterious war god, Yuri and Princess Alice had spent quite a few days in Europe.

However, the HimeMiko generously accepted the apology.

"Please do not let it weigh on your mind. After all, I never do special studying for exams during normal school days. It is completely fine."

"Eh, really?"

"Really."

Yuri had been listening quietly to Godou's conversation about exams with the rest.

Watching the gentle Yamato Nadeshiko's calm and modest smile, doubt appeared in Godou's mind.

"Could it be true, that not only are Mariya's grades fine, they are actually very good?"

"--! I-I do not consider them bad."

An evasive answer.

Normally, only a person with bad grades would answer in that manner. But considering Yuri's serious honors student aura and conscientiousness, the actual truth was probably the opposite.

Clearly thinking the same thing, Erica joined into the conversation.

"Although such inquisitiveness is rather unladylike... I am very curious about this."

"Indeed. If her grades were ordinary, Mariya Yuri should be responding more calmly."

Prompted by the red and blue knights, Godou asked:

"So what were your grades for the midterm exams? But it's fine, you don't have to tell us if you don't want to."

The three looked towards the HimeMiko together. Yuri shyly lowered her gaze and softly whispered "...What were they?"

In complete contrast to her shy tone of voice, the grades she divulged approached perfection in every subject.

"Even if you consider the entire year group, those grades would still get you into the top five..."

"Whenever Yuri gets serious, looks like you always get these kinds of grades..."

As Liliana and Erica exclaimed with admiration, Godou could not help but mutter.

"Amazing. That's similar to Sorimachi's grades."

"Ah... Is that so?"

"Yeah. That guy, despite the way he acts, actually has really good grades."

" "Eh?!" "

As Yuri acknowledged casually, Erica and Liliana expressed shock.

"Wait a minute, Godou. That name you just mentioned -- you are referring to that person in our class?"

"The one who keeps going on and on about little sisters and maid cafes?"

"Of course. That guy Sorimachi's grades are actually good enough to be number one in our year... But I can understand your surprise for sure."

"This guy, I remember him being part of the group nicknamed..."

"The Three Idiots, apparently they are regarded as that..."

"Well, they are idiots in behavior and personality, that's for sure..."

Erica and Liliana displayed surprise as if confronted with some sort of illogical fact.

This could very well be Godou's first time seeing them so puzzled within school. Getting a strange feeling from this unexpected occurrence, Godou continued.

"By the way, I think Nanami is actually smarter than me. Takagi, on the other hand, seems to have similar grades as me?"

Godou suddenly realized something as he listed out the names of his classmates the Three Idiots.

"It might actually be a good idea to study together with these smart guys before future exams. It's about time I stay away from all those violent incidents and focus my attention and energy towards endeavors fitting for a high school student."

"Then let alone the future, why don't you do that for this upcoming exam as well?"

Questioned by Erica, Godou began to smile wryly.

"The end of term exams will be here in a few days. It'd be kind of awkward for them if someone requests something like that so suddenly. After all, they should be focusing on their own studying..."

As soon as he finished his sentence, Godou realized. Come to think of it, wasn't there an excellent student who clearly said she "did not do special studying for exams" right here?

Erica was already looking at her when she made her suggestion.

Realizing the intent of Erica's gaze, Liliana and Godou looked towards Yuri. Enduring the stares of the three, the humble high-class young lady squirmed uncomfortably.

"So Yuri, as the one furthest along the academic path, I hope you can provide us with some guidance, how's that?"

"U-Ummm, guidance would be too arrogant a description..."

"Can't we hold a study meeting? To be honest, I have completely no desire to spend any time preparing for exams. However, working in cooperation towards a common goal like this once in a while would be an exciting and interesting change."

Hearing such a typical Erica-style comment, Godou began to smile wryly.

However, to this point they had apparently never collaborated on study

activities -- perhaps Yuri also realized the same thing.

Smiling with a chuckle, Yuri spoke gently.

"Although I am not sure how much I may be of help... I am sure studying hard together with everyone will be quite enjoyable."

After school, the quartet left school together to hold an emergency study meeting.

"Where should we go? Maybe my home or Erica's apartment would be nice?"

"During times like these, Japanese students usually congregate in the eateries near the school, right?"

Liliana answered as Godou sought everyone's opinion just as they left the school gates.

"Yeah. Family restaurants, fast food places or the like."

"Then no matter what, we should try to emulate this kind of custom, right? As the saying goes, when in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Liliana suggested as if her playful spirit had been roused by the study meeting plan.

"Speaking of which, I do occasionally visit those kinds of shops with the members of the tea ceremony club."

"If the purpose was to savor the food, I would avoid those types of places lacking in individuality. But following this line of thought sounds agreeable. I will second Liliana's motion."

Yuri's eyes flashed slightly with excitement and Erica nodded and supported the idea openly.

Godou could do nothing but smile awkwardly as the core purpose of their gathering shifted from "study" to "meeting." However, he did not object. It would be a bit too tasteless to expect concrete benefits from a last-minute study meeting held just before the exams.

The important thing was the fact of "everyone gathering to study together."

Be that as it may--

The three girls, Erica, Yuri and Liliana, all seemed to lead lives that seldom brought them into contact with fast food shops and the like.

From the series of statements just now, the nature of their private lives could be easily deduced.

Just as he expected, the girls were slightly different from "ordinary." Godou nodded to himself.

Hence, the princess, the high-class young lady and the knight who had been training magic, spirit powers or the like since childhood could be considered a group. Consequently, it was Godou's mission as the high school student representative of ordinary people to assist them today--

Godou secretly resolved himself.

Cutting to the chase, the quartet made the rounds amongst the various family restaurants and fast food places near the school.

But things did not go well.

No matter which shop they went to, all were packed with students from Jounan Academy. There was no room for Godou and his group at all. Considering that exams were imminent, it was only natural for there to be many groups executing their plans of "gathering friends to hold a study meeting."

"It can't be helped, let's go to my house instead."

The journey from the school to the Kusanagi home took fifteen minutes on foot.

Although he thought this was a reasonable substitute, Erica shook her head decisively.

"No. We have to stick to our plan. If we take the train to another area, shouldn't we be able to find unoccupied shops?"

Instantly, Godou recalled the saying, "putting the cart before the horse."

After forty minutes, Godou muttered with deep feeling.

"Who could have expected a day like this..."

The quartet had gone to Ueno from Jounan Academy at Nezu.

However, all the fast food places and family restaurants in the station's neighborhood felt rather noisy and crowded.

One shop was filled with old men and women. All of them were dressed for traveling, probably having just gotten off a bus or something, in the middle of taking a break.

Another shop, on the other hand, was filled with lively young men and women in their twenties and thirties.

Accidentally overhearing the subject of their vigorous conversation, it seemed like they were members of a small drama troupe. After a public performance, they were having a pre-party before heading to a Izakaya.^[4]

There were other shops that they visited.

One had a group of young men and women, roughly ten in number, with a large amount of manuscripts spread out on the tables, using staplers to assemble them into booklets. Glancing from a distance, one could see the pages were filled with what appeared to be manga illustrations and panels.

This was apparently the production of doujinshi -- the binding of copies.

Clearly there was a great amount of freedom as to what people were allowed to do in the shop, displaying the scene of a fast food place in a prosperous neighborhood. Speaking of which, Ueno was right next to Akihabara, the origin of the doujinshi.

"Although it looks like we should be able to find a shop that can accommodate us four, spending time on this search would prove rather pointless."

Why don't we just give up and go to my house to start the study meeting?

Erica was the first to refute what Godou was about to propose.

"So, let's simply get a hotel room."

This sounded like novelists or manga artists of old who would work on their manuscripts in this manner.

Godou was about to object when others did it for him.

"Eh, Erica-san, this is only the study meeting of students, going to that kind of place would seem..."

"The cost-effectiveness is far too dismal. This is clearly a waste."

Yuri cautiously expressed disagreement as Liliana warned with displeasure.

I see. Godou was struck by a revelation.

Yuri and Liliana both shopped at supermarkets and did their own cooking. Consequently, compared to Erica who grew up as a sheltered high-class lady, their sense of spending was closer to a normal person's. Contrasting with the typical high school girl whose cooking experience was zero, perhaps they were more principled in this area.

Ignoring Godou who nodded in agreement, Erica smiled tenderly.

"But consider this. Given this expenditure, we not only avoid wasting time, but also get a chance to study hard together, working on a group collaborative effort we have never tried before. In light of that, I think it is money well spent, is it not?"

That's not right, this is clearly using money impertinently, okay?

Just as Godou was about to object, he was shocked. Erica's rhetoric actually worked!

"Perhaps that is true..."

Saying that, Yuri bowed her head in thought. Even Liliana went:

"Well, I admit this idea is 10% reasonable..."

Muttering with a bitter expression. I see. Godou was struck with yet another revelation.

Even if their sense of spending was closer to a normal person's, it was still not the same. Hence, they were beginning to waver as a result of Erica's words. Also, one more thing.

They all seemed to be putting forth all their effort, trying to turn this "study meeting" into some kind of extraordinary event.

At the same time, he also discovered something else. These girls, whose lives were often removed from the ordinary, had no intention of wasting precious times of peace on school activities. Struck with a strange sense of relief somehow, Godou decided to play along in this situation.

That said, using a hotel would be a bit too much.

"Wait a minute, there's a shop nearby that's opened by someone I know. Let me try asking him if we could borrow the place. Then we shouldn't have to waste money unnecessarily..."

Godou took out his cellphone.

Even though this alternative plan had its own issues, the tradeoffs were worth it.

In order to resolve the emergency, Godou decided to rely on the power of an acquaintance. Also, he was hoping this could make everybody happy--

Several hours later, the study meeting concluded peacefully without incident.

The place they borrowed was the "shop" opened by an acquaintance and happened to be closed for the day. There, they studied for their exams with Yuri as their center. Consulting one another whenever they encountered things they did not understand, they copied borrowed notes and occasionally engaged in idle chatter and laughter.

Oh well, who knew how many marks their grades improved through these few hours of studying, nevertheless, Erica, Yuri and Liliana, as well as Godou himself, all spent a fulfilling time together.

"So, to return the favor to the owner, let me stay behind to clean up. You girls can go first."

Godou told his companions as he took out the cleaning equipment from the closet.

In actual fact, this was the shop where Godou worked part time, which explained why he was extremely familiar with where everything was located.

Since the shopkeeper-owner had given him a spare key in the past, they were

able to enter the shop which was closed today (of course, he obtained consent over the phone first).

"Godou-san, we want to help clean up too..."

"Before we do that, I would like to confirm a few things first. May I?"

Yuri and Liliana suddenly exchanged glances and asked Godou.

"This shop is the place where you work. Also, you are trusted to the level of the shopkeeper handing you a spare key. Is this really fine?"

Godou nodded to confirm Liliana's question.

"Yes. Yanagi-san already said before. The shopkeeper of this place is currently busy."

Godou had heard that a friend of Yanagi-san's was opening a shop offering wine and western cuisine in half a month's time.

It seemed to be an old acquaintance Yanagi-san knew from his days as fellow bartender trainees. In order to assist him in this critical challenge in life, Yanagi-san decided to help prepare the menu.

Which was why Yanagi-san frequently traveled to the place where his friend's shop was set to open.

He often had to stay there overnight and hence neglected his own shop. Realizing this, Yanagi-san had made a spare key and entrusted it to the shop's only male employee.

'Whenever I'm late, could you please do the opening preparations?'

'Sure, no problem. But is it really okay to give a key to a student who only works part time? There's no guarantee I won't do anything bad, right?'

'Hoho. I'm sure Godou-kun won't do those kinds of things, right?'

No matter what, Godou was not going to confess his various crimes against famous tourist attractions and historical sites all over the world.

Faced with the dashing smile displayed by Yanagi-san, Godou felt rather anxious and unsettled.

'Besides, aren't there university kids who work part time as shopkeepers too? I

have that experience too. Godou-kun counts as that kind of situation.'

'Umm... I'm still a high school student currently.'

'No problem. Your resume here at our shop has been written "in that way" already.'

Yanagi-san cheerfully revealed his crime of forgery.

'In fact, you are welcome to come and have fun before opening time, and stay for the night after closing. Do as you wish, but I'll rely on you to act as the shopkeeper temporarily for now.'

This was the conversation he had with the shopkeeper of the "Three Backs" bar and restaurant in Ueno.

Even though it was simply chatting, on a day when there were only regular customers present, Yanagi-san left while his shop was in business and went over to his friend's, really leaving Godou in charge as the substitute shopkeeper.

Although Yanagi-san really was a great guy, he did occasionally act ridiculously like that, Godou recalled.

"Indeed, perhaps we do not quite understand the standards of 'normal' with respect to Japanese high school students."

Liliana sighed with a gloomy expression. Next to her, Yuri also surveyed the interior of the shop with a worried look and said: "Nevertheless, I do not believe working in this kind of shop counts as 'normal.'"

Yuri's gaze turned towards the numerous shelves filled with alcohol opposite to the cash register. These were collected by Yanagi-san over the past decade or two and included many precious and famous wines.

"It sounds a little ungrateful, but choosing this kind of place expressly to hold a study meeting is a bit too..."

"Clearly cannot be described as normal..."

As Yuri pointed things out, Liliana nodded in agreement. Godou began to panic.

"N-No, well. Because none of you seemed eager to go to someone's house.

You all wanted to study outside. It's true I did feel slightly apprehensive about this place but under such conditions it shouldn't be a big deal, right?"

"Trying to muddle things through with a description of 'slightly,' how typical of Godou's excuses."

Erica entered the conversation after thoughtful consideration.

"Fundamentally, the fact that such a place was available as a choice is in itself rather unusual. Even though 80% of Godou's everyday life is spent in extraordinary circumstances, the remaining 20% never ceases to amaze others in his disposition towards abnormality. As expected of the godslaying Devil King."

Hearing these unexpected words, Yuri and Liliana nodded firmly in agreement.

Hence, Godou's banner of "commoners representative, a simple high school student" was marred by the addition of a question mark, and thus the study meeting concluded.

This was a scene that occurred just as December and midwinter was arriving the very next day.

Chapter 4 - The King's Game

The Kusanagi family had a custom of gathering together for the New Years to have a party.

The main family and its off branches gathered in one big hall and drank till they dropped.

There were unexpectedly many heavy drinkers in the family and only a few people couldn't hold their liquor.

The enormous amounts of alcohol their ancestors had kept consuming had led to their family developing alcohol-decomposing-enzymes on par with the Russians. At least that is how one of their relatives had recklessly put it.

This gathering stressed Godou out to no end.

The banquet by itself was still fine. Well, it was a good chance to rekindle relationships with relatives one didn't see often. However.

Later there was the after party, which was the truly troubling matter.

Hanafuda, cee-lo, poker, backgammon, mahjong, it was this sort of crazy gambling festival that combined Japanese and Western games.

Furthermore, they were betting real money, and with ridiculous amounts at that.

On the surface children were strictly forbidden from participating, but Godou had intermingled since he was six.

Godou had always been dearly loved by an old man who had died 5 years ago. The legend stated that long ago this man was the strongest as well as the last gambler of Kantou. Whenever they met, the old man would teach Godou various games.

A few relatives who knew about this took Godou gambling for fun on New Years.

...in the end, he made a killing.

By then it was unstoppable. Like a rolling stone.

To take revenge, once New Year came around the adults would get fired up and force Godou to come with them. And he would inadvertently win. This year was the tenth year of this never ending cycle of madness.

Well, I'm in high school now, it's about time I get away from that...

Godou muttered words of caution to himself.

Right now it was late in the wintry month of December. The end of the year and the New Year celebrations were right around the corner. This year he really had to cut ties with that unpleasant gambling party...

Well, even if he went, perhaps he could just play in a way that didn't stand out...

However that wouldn't work. In the face of both victory and defeat, he would be ignited with a blazing battle spirit. Godou painfully thought about how this could completely be described as a gambling hell.

It was about time to think of countermeasures.

While Godou was racking his brains, the 25th of December arrived.

It was the day after the modest party held on Christmas Eve. On this day "the usual suspects" - Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena - had gathered at the Kusanagi household.

The party had gone late into the night.

When the morning after the party came, everyone assembled once again to tidy up the house.

After everyone finished cleaning the house, they gathered in the living room for a break.

They were chatting and exchanging their plans for New Year. It wasn't until this moment that Godou found out about the end-of-the-year festivities the

hime-mikos had. Furthermore, for a certain reason he decided he would also participate, but—

—That is a later story.

“Excuse me, there are some matters that require my attention. I’ll be outside answering the phone.”

Erica’s cellphone ringtone had suddenly sounded. After she briefly glanced over the name on the display screen, Erica got up.

“Looks like she is quite busy during the end of the year....” muttered Godou as he eyed Erica from behind as she left the living room.

For the two hime-miko Yuri and Ena, New Year's holidays meant a busy period, too. Maybe everyone was tied up during this time after all.

"In Europe, even more than New Year’s, the time around Christmas - right about now - is the liveliest, busiest period. Come the new year, it’s all the more peaceful though," said Liliana, who was born in Europe.

Thinking about it, many countries with the lunar or Hindu calendar also celebrated New Year's, although it seemed like the various customs differed greatly depending on where you were. Godou was intrigued by the thought.

"Which reminds Ena, Your Majesty said you didn't want to go to the New Year's party?"

"As I recall, you said there was that difficult after party?"

Godou nodded in response to Ena’s and Yuri’s questions

"Frankly, calling it an after party isn’t quite the right expression. This is a gathering in which the men among our relatives will use a ridiculous amount of money to go on an all-night gambling spree. They even specially reserve a small restaurant..."

"Hey, that sounds pretty interesting~."

“G-Gambling.....are you talking about betting money!?”

While Ena's eyes were sparkling, the sensible Yuri was shocked.

"U-um, why is a minor like Godou participating in such a gathering? I just don't understand the reason."

"Ahhh.....When I was a child I accidentally made a killing once. Since then, every year they would force me to participate."

"Well..."

"Anyway, I also think it's time for me to get away from gambling."

"G-Godou-san, someone your age shouldn't be saying these kinds of things...."

Of course Yuri was expressing her dissatisfaction. On the other hand, Liliana said the following:

"Kusanagi Godou, would you mind if I accompany you? As your grand chamberlain, it is one of my duties to support you in that situation."

"You'd better not, Liliana~.....I don't think you'd be able to adapt to that kind of environment."

"Not able to adapt?"

"Simply put, there's that Salvatore Doni, right? Imagine dozens of people like him getting fired up, absorbed in gambling like idiots, eyes bloodshot... Have fun with that dump truck with broken brakes."

"" ... ""

After hearing the name of that brainless young Italian, Yuri and Liliana fell silent altogether.

Their expressions were half shocked, half astonished. Apparently it got across that it was a racket beyond help or reason.

However the third girl - Ena was actually happily laughing.

"Ena's been coming and going at such places since she was a child. Your Majesty seems very capable, too. How about a contest with Ena?"

"With you, Seishuuin?"

"Ena's been taught by that well-connected uncle and the priest, and her fencing master, too, so she can boast a bit. Want to give it a shot?"

"I've got no reason to refuse, but... your acquaintances are also messed up, aren't they?"

A priest and a kendoist (someone who does kendo~~) teaching a little girl how to gamble...

Their titles seemed strict, but the details reminded him of Yakuza more than anything, Godou murmured unintentionally.

"I wonder what we have in the house right now... if we search, finding a hanafuda deck or something should be really easy."

"Hanafuda~? Sure, then Yuri can play, too. This is perfect!"

""Eh?""

Ena's suggestion was fishy, so Godou and Yuri retorted in unison.

"Mariya actually gambles... no way, right?"

"Ah, yes. Ena said she knew a fun game and taught me, so I accompanied her from time to time and... don't tell me..."

"Yuri's got good intuition so she's actually quite a formidable opponent. Playing with her will be fun!"

"T-that actually was gambling, wasn't it!?"

"It's fine~. You didn't bet a single yen!"

"S-till. Come to think of it, whenever I won at those card games, Ena-san used to treat me to all those places!?"

"Well, it's better with some motivation, right~?"

"Hey, don't get Mariya involved in weird affairs she knows nothing about!"

Yuri was shocked to find out that she had unintentionally engaged in immoral conduct, Ena laughed anyway and was rebuked by Godou.

Liliana, who had been quietly listening to this conversation from the side, noisily cleared her throat.

"If we are all playing, I may be somewhat disadvantaged at a Japanese game. I would like you to be considerate of that fact."

"Then~... let's play something simple like trump or dice."

"Is Liliana-san participating as well? If that is the case we'll have to do this properly."

While Godou was thinking, Ena was feeling around in her pocket in front of him. She produced several coins. They were not game money but real 100 and 500 yen coins.

"W-we're betting money, Ena-san!?"

"Isn't this much peachy?"

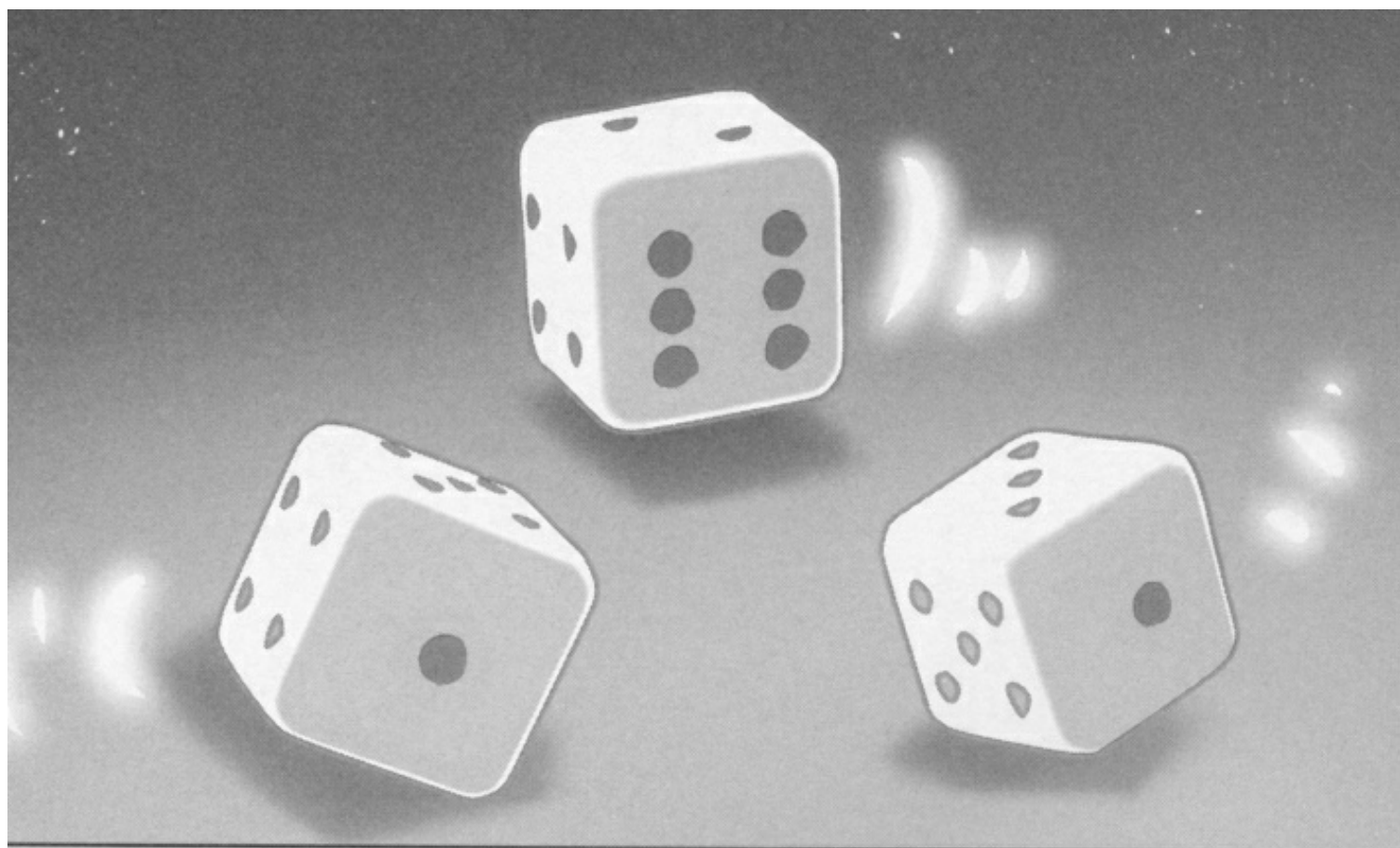
"This probably amounts to lunch money..... Well, there shouldn't be any problems if we just spend it on that afterwards."

Godou came up with the idea because it was almost noon.

Yuri and Liliana were not really enthusiastic but in the end they got caught up in it.

The young lady who was actually quite skilled. The knight estranged from all matters gambling. The child of nature who already had the presence of a gambler. Just how would this game develop?

They wanted a simple and fair game, so they chose Cee-lo^[5].



However they completely gave up on the annoying rules regarding the '1 - 2 - 3' and '4 - 5 - 6'. They didn't use a dice cup either. All they did was roll three dice and compared the results.

Godou, Yuri, Liliana, and Ena alternated turns and got immersed into the game.

Twenty minutes passed.

As a result of the match taking place in the Kusanagi's living room, everyone's bets were piling up in front of Godou. By the way, everyone had only bet the small sum of 1000 yen.

The match had played out rather reasonably.

In the end, the inexperienced Liliana was the first to lose all her money and afterwards the remaining three people were pretty evenly matched. She competed against Godou to the very end but eventually exhausted all her strength as well.

Just like that, Godou was the sole victor.

"Uhh~..... Your Majesty, let's play another round!"

"Alright, I'll give this back then."

Godou took the 4000 yen total and equally distributed the 100 yen and 500 yen coins back to everyone after hearing Ena's request.

They had a second round. Again, Kusanagi Godou won.

Third round, Godou's win. Fourth round, Godou's win once again.

".....Is there some sort of trick to winning this?"

After his fourth victory, Liliana just had to ask.

"It is hard to imagine that there exists an explanation for someone who can keep winning continuously in such a luck based game."

"Well, I can't say there's none."

Godou readily answered and Liliana pushed on.

"If it is not too much to ask, please tell me. Or is it some kind of secret?"

“It isn’t that kind of thing. It’s just, you know, the only thing I do is refrain from having even the slightest thought of losing and whenever I roll the dice, I believe that victory will certainly come to me.”

“And you win with just that!?”

Godou nodded at the astonished Liliana.

When he was a small child, he had learned the ‘secret of winning’ from that distantly related grandpa. What’s important is luck, confidence, analyzing the field and the tenacity for victory. That’s the ultimate secret the old man had passed on to him.

This old man carried a Kurikara dragon pattern on his back and could confront twenty hoodlums with just a long dagger. With such tales of bravery, he was quite a formidable person. Each and every one of his teaching was like a childhood trauma, still actively resonating inside Godou to this day.

As a matter of fact, that philosophy was unexpectedly useful when fighting against gods, too.

“As I thought, someone slaying gods isn’t normal~...”

“Now that you mention it, when we travelled to London, I heard from Princess Alice that Alexander Gascoigne-sama is also very adept at gambling...”

Ena’s and Yuri’s unanimous evaluations left Godou flustered.

“Th-this is nothing like a special skill. Please stop putting it like it’s related to Campione. And don’t compare me to that Gascoigne, either.”

That common point with Alec had caught him off guard.

While he was concealing his inner unrest, even Liliana joined in:

“But I have also heard about it: previously in Monaco when Sir Salvatore played roulette for the first time, his winnings through beginner’s luck were off the charts... Maybe devil kings, who have superhuman good luck and a tenacity for victory, should have more talent in this field compared to normal humans....”

Godou frantically refuted this very serious opinion.

“W-wait a minute! There are many people who are better at gambling than I

am! Take Erica for example.”

“What about me? Looks like you're all having a good time here.”

With great timing, the blonde Italian girl returned to the living room.

She had been away from her seat for quite a while so it must have been a very complicated matter. But now she was smiling with her usual splendor and radiance.

Seeing that smile, Godou had an idea.

“Hey, Erica. It’s been a while but how about a bet just between you and me? The loser will have to go and buy everybody’s lunch.”

“We haven’t done that for a while, have we? I’m in.”

Erica readily answered and produced one gold coin from her wallet.

It was an antique from ancient Rome. Carrying this kind of thing around was so like her. Erica flipped the coin into the air with her thumb.

She used the back of her left hand to catch the falling gold coin and quickly covered it with her right.

“I leave it to you Godou. Heads or tails, which is it?”

“I say tails.”

Immediately after he replied, Erica lifted her right hand.

It was unknown which one, but the appearing coin had the carving of the face of a Roman emperor.

It was heads.

“...It’s my loss. I just can’t seem to win against Erica.”

The two of them had often decided who’d have to go buy lunch like this right after Erica had transferred in. Ever since Yuri joined in, they had stopped doing it. Godou felt like he had kept winning early on, but before he knew it, the losses started piling up.

“I can’t win that often in card games like poker either.... as you can see, there are people who are better at gambling than I am so don’t think I’m weird, ok?”

Godou told Liliana, Yuri and Ena who had watched this act.

After watching the three girls stiffly nod, Godou gathered the coins they had been using in place of chips and got up.

He took Erica's lunch money as well and left the house just like that.

Thus the four girls remained in the Kusanagi's living room.

One minute after Godou had left his seat, Liliana slowly began speaking.

"Erica, that just now... did you do that?"

"Yes, if I don't, I can't really win against Godou in these games."

When Erica openly confessed, Yuri sighed.

"So you did trick him with magic..."

"You cheated! But I'm surprised His Majesty didn't notice~"

"That's because I'm careful. I lose once in awhile. And because Godou himself keeps winning at gambling like it's a joke, he doesn't doubt me too much when I do the same. He just feels like 'such things happen'."

After answering the astonished Ena, Erica laid her eyes on the dice on the table.

"I wanted to try gambling with Godou, but wasn't it amazing? When I noticed his talent I was shocked too. The people who become Campiones really are extraordinary in every way."

"But counteracting that by cheating with magic is problematic too...", the overly serious knight Liliana gave her a sour look. However, Erica replied with the composed face of a noblewoman.

"I'm a bit reluctant about it as well. But it's fine. Godou wants to believe that he's 'normal' himself doesn't he? When he learned that I was "stronger" at gambling, he was actually really happy."

"I see. Because he's too good, he has an antipathy against gambling~."

"The way he thinks is the "only" thing about Godou that adheres to common

sense, isn't it...."

"Don't you think letting him dream a bit is a show of consideration as his lover? And nobody's bothered by it either!"

Erica winked as if indicating this was exactly her intention at the nodding Ena and Yuri.

Chapter 5 - The Kusanagi Family's Parttime Job

Part 1

"This time, I really feel like I got duped by Onii-chan..."

Kusanagi Shizuka frowned unhappily.

Although she was a very cute girl, it was unbelievably intimidating whenever she put on such an expression. This possibly stemmed from her queen-like airs.

"Promising he was going to quit gambling, yet secretly taking a large group of girls on a trip to the South Seas..."

"Let me explain first, Shizuka."

Inside the living room in the Kusanagi residence, the one who talked back was Shizuka's older brother, Godou, of course.

There was only one day left in the winter break. The Kusanagi siblings had just returned from their separate long-distance trips.

"I didn't go on a trip 'secretly.' I already told you in advance I was going out. I even informed mom that I won't be home for a while."

"Y-You clearly omitted your destination and who you were traveling with!"

"What does it matter? I'm not obliged to report even this kind of stuff to my little sister. It's not like we're infants, right?"

"Hmph. In your case, I'm pretty sure there's a need every now and then."

Godou calmly confronted the furious Shizuka.

After all, he was a man without any sort of sister complex at all. Hence, he truly believed what he was saying. As the childhood friend of this pair of siblings, Tokunaga Asuka knew this very well.

"One day, Onii-chan, you'll turn into a womanizer rivaling Grandpa."

"Like I keep saying, don't compare me to Grandpa."

The sibling's grandfather, Kusanagi Ichirou, was a very popular figure in the neighborhood of Nezu's Area 3. Godou apparently bore a great resemblance to this old man in his youth.

That being said, the comparison was on facial terms. Their personalities were quite different.

Compared to the extroverted and uninhibited Ichirou, the grandson was quite rigid in personality. But the frightening thing was his ability to display "skills" rivaling his grandfather in spite of that.

"By the way, Shizuka-chan."

Asuka slowly began.

"Uncle Genzou continues to be such a free spirit, spending the whole New Year's over in the Caribbean."

Genzou was the father of the Kusanagi siblings.

Like that of his son's, it took many strokes to write out the kanji of his first name. Asuka recalled that his family name was also comparable to "Kusanagi" in complexity, requiring around thirty strokes to write out. After marrying into Genzou's family, the mother of the Kusanagi siblings, Mayo, had divorced when Godou first reached the age of understanding. After returning to her parents' home, Mayo had reverted back to her family name of Kusanagi.

That was also when the siblings first became acquainted with Asuka.

Next, Shizuka began to talk in a laid back manner about this father whose family name she did not share.

"Yeah, I think he went there last year. He mentioned something about making another fortune."

"Dad remains the same as always, huh? Our father is an investor while our mother is a queen..."

Godou muttered poignantly in response to his sister's report.

Hearing the siblings' comments, Asuka could not help but interject.

"Godou, you mean something like an entrepreneur or an industrialist, right?"

"Really? Dad sometimes uses something like 'film producer' on his business card but suddenly switches to other titles sometimes. It's all very suspicious."

"As for Mom... I guess she's a queen after all."

"That social network is plain extraordinary."

"The Kusanagi family situation remains so complicated."

Asuka shared a relationship with the siblings where they could chat like this in the living room of the Kusanagi residence.

Precisely because of that, Asuka knew quite well how "different" this family was from ordinary families.

"Nothing less expected from Godou and Shizuka-chan's parents."

"Hold on, Asuka."

"Yes. Putting Onii-chan aside, I don't agree with lumping me with them."

"...I have to state for the record. Compared to me, Shizuka is far more likely to end up as someone extraordinary."

"W-What are you talking about!? I am the only normal person in this family filled with weirdos. Don't group me with Onii-chan and the rest!"

"Hmm... The way I see it as a neighbor, you're probably not that different."

Asuka remarked quietly.

The Kusanagi siblings were nothing similar in terms of looks and personality. However, they shared the common trait of "acting differently from what they claimed."

Feeling indignant about the earlier comment, Shizuka raised a counterargument.

"Jeez... I'll make this clear first: I am someone with common sense. That makes me completely different from Onii-chan, right? Asuka-chan."

"Hold on, Shizuka, I have common sense too."

"Hmph. That's totally unconvincing coming from someone who's flirting with four or five girls with them always serving at your side."

While the little sister was making a face at her brother...

A text message alert sounded from Shizuka's cellphone on the table.

"Looks like there's a text message. What is it about? ...Oh, so it won't work out?"

"What happened?" asked Godou.

Looking at the cellphone screen, the younger sister sighed.

"Do you remember my friend Yui? My classmate, very petite."

"...Vaguely."

"We were planning to go on a graduation trip, but it's not working out now."

Shizuka was a third-year student at Jounan Academy's middle school division. In two months, she was going to graduate and join the high school division.

"Actually, her father was recently laid off."

"That's such a shame..."

"Will trip expenses be a burden on her parents?"

While Godou muttered, Asuka asked in worry next to him.

They were discussing a girl whom Asuka had seen a couple times. Asuka remembered she was definitely from Jounan Academy's middle school.

And now, she was facing a difficult situation—

Asuka felt sympathetic.

"True, I guess her father's employment is top priority."

"Oh, that's not a problem. I already introduced him to Mom."

"You introduced him to Aunt Mayo!?"

"Yes. I heard he was willing to do any kind of work and found a new job immediately. It's only during times like these that I feel that Mom is truly amazing."

"But Shizuka, that should be a respectable job, right?"

"Don't worry about that... Probably. Moreover."

Shizuka shrugged and made a very characteristic statement very much in her style as Kusanagi Godou's younger sister.

"As long as it's not outright illegal, it's better to work even if there's a bit of risk."

"Well, there's truth in that."

"Listen here, I don't think students in high school and middle school who can talk about these things with such open-mindedness can be considered ordinary."

"But Asuka-chan, the important thing here is finding a job."

Ignoring a common sense comment completely, Shizuka spoke:

"In any case, her father has landed a job, so Yui won't have to worry about school fees. But in consideration of her family situation, she intends to give up on the graduation trip."

"She's a middle schooler after all. It's not like she could work part-time to pay for the trip."

After Asuka made a very common sense statement, Godou nodded, followed by Shizuka who nodded vigorously.

"That's right. After all, there's no place that'll hire a third-year middle school student."

"Uh..."

Asuka groaned. This pair of siblings actually shared a common trait of "ignoring their own circumstances."

Towards Godou and Shizuka who were unaware of this, Asuka slowly spoke:

"Let me ask you, the Kusanagi siblings brimming with common sense... Aren't you two rich from a long time ago? Godou always makes a killing at the gambling party every New Year. Shizuka-chan always has more pocket money than she can spend."

"I-I don't earn money from gambling alone."

The Kusanagi clan's customary New Year gathering included a gambling party. The first-year high school student, who had kept the top spot for several years in

a row, frantically denied.

"I'm working respectable jobs too."

"Yeah, I know. You're a hardworking person by nature and feel uncomfortable about undeserved earnings. In that sense, you're quite respectable."

As the childhood friend who knew Kusanagi Godou's character very well, Asuka nodded.

On the other hand, Shizuka spoke in a very "surprised" manner:

"M-My pocket money isn't that much either. Rather, Mom is the type who advocates earning your own spending money."

"Very true, but occasionally, she does give on whim."

"Even so, things have been tough since we were young. You know that too, don't you, Asuka-chan?"

"Yeah, I know. So how about sharing some of your experiences in this area with Shizuka-chan's friend?"

" "....." "

The siblings fell into deep thought after hearing this suggestion. Then they began to chatter in a discussion.

"There are two more months until graduation, there should be enough time to work a job, right...?"

"She doesn't have any problems advancing to the next year, right?"

"None. Like me, we're already set to be promoted from middle school to high school."

"Well, you're allowed to work part-time once you're in high school. Bending rules a bit at the end of middle school—Should be fine, right?"

"Wanna try asking places that'll hire high schoolers?"

"There's probably no problem if we ask our relatives. But the hourly wage won't be very high. The goal is raise cash to pay for the trip, right?"

"In that case, it'll be more efficient if we did it ourselves..."

While listening to the older brother's opinion, the younger sister asked slowly:
"So, Onii-chan, are you willing to invest some capital?"

Part 2

On a certain day during a three-day break in the middle January...

Noontime, Kusanagi Godou was at a certain city's civic square in the Saitama prefecture. This place was reachable by train in less than an hour from Nezu's Area 3 in the Bunkyo ward.

Built along a river, the square was quite close to the train station. Its area was large enough to accommodate three simultaneous baseball matches.

Today, the civic square was serving as the venue for a gathering of B-class food stalls.

In addition, someone was accompanying Godou. Upon hearing that there was an event featuring a gathering of cheap food...

"Japan's pedestrian food has so much variety. It would be nice to go there and sample some of it."

This pompous statement was issued by Erica Blandelli.

The lively venue was crowded with people and numerous rows of stalls. Godou and the blonde girl, a striking sight even amidst the massive crowds, went over to vicinity of the target stall.

After gazing at that stall for a while, Erica slowly remarked:

"Your family is truly special, Godou."

"Huh, really? Compared to your family, we're just ordinary commoners. An ordinary family with nothing special."

Erica's sudden comment caused Godou to blink.

He never expected to hear something like that from a daughter of the House of Blandelli.

With a Devil King Campione for an ancestor and a prestigious family in the

world of magic, every generation of the Blandelli family had produced cadres in the [Copper Black Cross], one of Italy's top magic associations. A rich and powerful family, that was Erica's background.

"On the other hand, I do feel that Japanese middle schoolers who grew up in ordinary families would not be running a stall in this sort of place, would they? Shizuka-san seems to be quite active."

"Well, every family needs to make ends meet somehow."

Following Erica's gaze, Godou replied.

Since this was an event for nearby residents to buy food and enjoy a festival atmosphere, attendance was probably in the four-digit range. There was no comparing it to a local food festival gathering tens of thousands of people in a day.

Even so, the stalls all over the venue were exceptionally busy. Within Erica and Godou's view, Shizuka's stall was over there— Lightly dressed in a long-sleeved t-shirt and an apron despite the winter season, the Kusanagi family's eldest and only daughter was facing a steel plate.

She was in the middle of cooking a large amount of fried noodles. Frying noodles without neglecting to direct the people around her, she worked in a clean and decisive manner.

Three employees were laboring as hard as they could at the stall. Godou recognized the little sister's friend, a petite girl. She had probably visited the Kusanagi residence before.

The second employee was Asuka. She had agreed to help out at an hourly wage of 800 yen.

The last employee was a young man, twenty years old or so. That head of dyed hair—or rather, orange hair resulting from a self-bleaching failure—was truly quite conspicuous.

"Who is the guy who's clearly the oldest but getting ordered around by Shizuka-san?"

"Someone Shizuka borrowed from a business opened by one of our distant

relatives. This kind of stall requires an adult to be in charge of hygiene."

"What kind of business?"

"Well, it's a business that works mainly in catering... Currently."

"Is that so? The way I see it, he looks more like a yakuza flunkie."

"....."

As a side note, ten-odd years ago, before this business became legalized, it was a so-called "tekiya" stall whose predecessor was a small local yakuza group.

Even now, many of the staff and part-timers included "rebellious youths."

As an additional note, this business was left behind by the distant relative who had taught Godou how to gamble in the past.

The Kusanagi siblings had often helped out with the business, thus earning sizable "tips." Thanks to that, the siblings had also acquired a fair amount of respect in these circles.

Due to her inborn big-sister personality, Shizuka gained the recognition of the current proprietor, a former employee, and was even granted the authority to command junior staff "on site." No, it would be more apt to say that she had claimed such authority for herself spontaneously.

"No matter what, as long as business is bustling, it's all good."

Godou muttered.

Although the lunch hour had already passed, there were still many people at the venue. There was also a long lineup in front of Shizuka's stall. Aiming to make a killing at a local event, the younger sister had chosen fried noodles, a cost-effective type of food.

Adding beef and sweet miso sauce for seasoning was apparently her means to victory.

In fact, the aroma of miso and frying was quite fragrant, definitely appetizing.

"But Godou, is it that easy to set up shop in this kind of event?"

Looking around, Erica asked. She was most likely searching for the "rare food" she preferred.

"I feel that there would be eligibility issues and all kinds of troublesome procedures."

"That's very sharp of you. Well, there are all kinds of conditions such as only permitting local residents of the city to set up shop. This time, we happened to be lucky."

"Lucky?"

"Yeah. A certain participating organization suddenly cancelled. Also, my mother has many acquaintances in this city's business promotion association. Even the city councilor is my mother's drinking buddy."

"....."

"That's why things were settled within an hour just by giving my mother a bottle of wine."

"Then Godou, you supplied the capital to set up shop here?"

"Not just me, but my father too. Although he's a middle-aged delinquent, he dotes on his daughter. Then there are the savings of Shizuka herself and her friend's. They're all good kids who always save up their New Year money. Afterwards, we'll divide up profits proportional to each person's share of capital."

"So from planning to execution, all this preparation only took a week to complete...?"

Knowing the gist of things, Erica remarked with slight surprise.

"In any case, there is one indisputable point. Even judging from the standards of the Blandelli family, Godou's family and relatives are evidently not ordinary at all."

"Hey hey..."

Godou never expected to hear something like that from a family whose daily life involved stuff like knights, magic and gods.

Due to the various complicated situations of his mother, father, and others in the clan, Godou could grudgingly accept a comment of "not ordinary" from Asuka.

However, he did not want to hear the same from someone like Erica. It was uncertain whether she understood Godou's feelings on this matter, but the Italian girl continued: "I fully agree that starting your own business instead of working for someone would be the most efficient way to earn high profits. However, I don't think this is a notion that belongs to an ordinary Japanese student."

Erica shrugged.

"I never heard anyone in class talking about investments or entrepreneurship. At most, they only mention part-time jobs at various shops, right?"

"I-I can't believe I'm hearing you talk about what's 'ordinary' for students, Erica..."

Always doing as she pleased, the free-spirited girl was talking about common sense.

Godou was surprised by this. Erica frowned too.

"I suppose it cannot be helped, even though I have no right to say this. Godou, it's your fault, you know? Because you keep showing us words and actions counter to common sense."

"....."

Seeing Erica's look of righteous fury, Godou could not help but swallow his rebuttal down his throat.



Chapter 6 - A Meeting of Men(?) on a Certain Day

After Japan's Campione spent New Year's in the South Seas, almost half a month had passed.

Just as mid-January was about to arrive, Sayanomiya Kaoru made a visit to the "Peerless Statesman" maid cafe. As soon as she had settled in her seat, she extended an invitation to the two others seated at the table.

"If you're free, would you like to spend the upcoming Valentine's Day together with me?"

" "....." "

Lu Yinghua and Amakasu Tuma both responded with silence to this sudden invitation.

They were currently occupying the VIP room in the depths of the shop. This was a special room which was even equipped with a billiards table, darts and a card game table. Its level of luxury completely did not belong in a maid cafe in Akihabara.

After a brief while, Amakasu spoke up.

"With confidence and hope, let me ask this question first. The purpose of this invitation isn't to give us chocolate, is it? On the off chance that it might be the case, please allow me to decline with utmost perseverance."

"Yeah, hanging with you Sayanomiya-niisan, it's enough to make one go mad."

"You two seem to have ignored my gender magnificently."

Watching even someone like Lu Yinghua overcome with frowns, Kaoru smiled wryly on her androgynous and beautiful face.

Her handsome features seemed neither male nor female. The closest description would be that of an androgynous Adonis who appeared in shoujo manga in the olden days. Nevertheless, Kaoru's gender was certifiably female, and she was even a HimeMiko as well.

As a side note, today she was dressed in a men's jacket and slacks.

"Just as you speculated, I wish for you two to accept my chocolate. These could be said to be my feelings, or more accurately, the feelings of a great number of girls."

"Unwittingly, you've leaked a rather suspicious matter..."

In response to Amakasu's mutterings, Kaoru smiled with delight and continued:

"Just as you already know, I am a third year high school student who is about to graduate to university. Furthermore, I am adored by all the female students in the school, including the student council president."

"Hey Nii-san, are you even studying seriously in high school?"

"Surprising as it may seem, she does go to school. A certain prestigious all-girls school. After spending three years in high school, wearing a specially tailored uniform, she has even gone so far as to become the idol of all the students and the female teachers."

Prompted by Yinghua, Amakasu explained in a shocked tone of voice.

Seeing the conversation take a turn in this direction so quickly, Kaoru smiled cordially and began to bring up the main point.

"Yes. Well then, it is predicted that the number of female students and older ladies giving chocolate to the departing Sayanomiya Kaoru will rise threefold compared to last year. I have already started receiving quite a number of presents given in advance. So this year, I'd like to have a more ideal system for receiving the influx of chocolate."

"In other words, you want us to help out?"

"A great answer, Amakasu-san! Lu-kun, I will require the use of these premises on February 14. I will set aside a fraction of this courtesy chocolate to be

processed into a cake for everyone as my present."

"Well, provided it doesn't interfere with promotional activities on Valentine's Day, I don't really mind."

"What do you intend to do with the remaining fraction?"

"Donate the chocolate to places where there are many children and keep my personal favorites. There're various ways to deal with it. Prior preparations are already underway in this area."

"As usual, you're not using your talents on proper work..."

Amakasu sighed in response to his boss' flawless preparations.

Winking at her loyal and obedient subordinate, Kaoru continued.

"Besides, this gathering is men only. Girls are forbidden to join. I also plan on inviting members of the History Compilation Committee and certain bachelors that I know."

"So, you're going to invite Honored Uncle too?"

"Kusanagi-san? He'd probably accept with relief if I were to invite him."

"Because he is the type who can only relax in the company of men. But if Kusanagi-san were to come here, there will be a lot of grumbling from various sources."

Kusanagi Godou was the Campione who resided in Japan. Kaoru smiled wryly as she mentioned his name.

"We'll just have to come up with countermeasures when the time comes. After all, inviting Kusanagi-san here will be very interesting."

"Please don't dupe the world's great Devil King just for fun. This is our domestic godslayer after all, the unprecedented debuting Campione whose identity no one could have predicted until last spring."

Amakasu warned as if completely drained in energy.

"Prior to a year ago, the Witenagemot had never reported any Campiones leaving their mark on Japan."

"Oh yeah, is that the thing that gets delivered from England every month?"

As a Hong Kong martial artist, Lu Yinghua was not very well acquainted in these matters and expressed his puzzlement.

"Yes. Once interested parties are registered as members, they can receive regular reports about Campiones and research materials if they wish."

"It's also become quite convenient to read this kind of stuff on the net nowadays."

As soon as Kaoru spoke, Amakasu took out a tablet terminal.

"See, all sorts of things are recorded here."

"...What is this? There's nothing shocking in there at all."

This was an English website restricted only to members. After briefly browsing through the contents on the tablet handed over to him, Lu Yinghua shrugged. Amakasu and Kaoru smiled wryly in response.

"Well of course, the disciple of the most deadly Campione would simply dismiss this level of information with a snort of laughter."

"There are some detailed descriptions about the new generation's quartet."

Alexandre Gascoigne. John Pluto Smith.

Salvatore Doni. And Kusanagi Godou.

Among the seven Campiones, they were the quartet known as the new generation. Apart from the one living in Los Angeles whose age was unknown, they were all youngsters ranging from teens to their twenties.

In particular, information regarding Black Prince Alec was especially detailed.

The five authorities he possessed—divine speed, vengeance, the labyrinth, the gravity sphere and the servant that could not be seen. His peculiar personality. And also the various incidents and atrocities he committed incessantly.

The vast majority of records were authored by Princess Alice, the White Princess who stood as the Black Prince's longstanding adversary.

There were also collections of eyewitness accounts of John Pluto Smith's transformations and the like.

The demonic deity Tezcatlipoca's giant form as the [Obsidian Shaman]. The

black Panthera feline, the [Jaguar]. The [Sun]'s symbolic manifestation, the [Flames of Annihilation]. The demonic bird ruling over the [Wind of Destruction]. These were reportedly the [Smoking One]'s various manifestations resulting from the offering of sacrifices...

"Sir Salvatore and Honored Uncle's information seems quite basic in comparison. I think a lot more can be written by this point."

"Oh, that's probably intentional."

"This information seems to be purposely written to avoid giving the reader the impression that 'Campiones actually have weaknesses.' It's probably a deliberate omission of information such as the usage conditions of Kusanagi-san's authority or the excessively childish character of Sir Salvatore."

"What should I say, this way of doing things is really..."

"This is to prevent people from picking fights with Campiones on whim or something like that. It couldn't go well anyway."

"Yeah, that's quite true indeed."

Yinghua smiled grimly in response to Amakasu's speculation.

"There really do exist many idiots in this world who would get the wrong idea from this type of information."

"By the way, Lu-kun, has the thought of making a move on Kusanagi-san in a moment of vulnerability ever occurred to you? Given how well you know him, you must have plenty of opportunities to act, right?"

"What nonsense are you suggesting? Trying to target these moments of vulnerability would be like committing suicide."

In the face of Kaoru's impish chuckling, the martial realm's promising young star remained unfazed.

"Even if there are openings to be taken advantage of or weaknesses one could exploit, don't forget that these are people who overcame impossible odds through sheer brutish will alone. Don't go calling this overkill, but I doubt even a missile would work. Besides, I'm not prepared for the challenge of committing suicide together with all of Tokyo."

"Yes, indeed that is the inevitable outcome."

Speaking as if summing up, Amakasu then turned his gaze to the writings displayed on the tablet.

"Anyway, in the elders group, there's really not much written apart from records of Marquis Voban."

"Speaking of the Marquis' information, it does make a note that the theory of slaying Fenrir 'is actually mistaken.' Also, didn't Yuri express her doubts last time regarding the slaying of Balor?"

"Based on the images Yuri reported, it feels like the ancient Roman hero and one-eyed war god, Horatius Cocles."[\[6\]](#)

The trio of Marquis Voban, Her Eminence Luo Hao and Madame Aisha were considered the Campiones of olden days.

They were already active before Greenwich's Witenagemot had accumulated sufficient power and influence. In particular, the two female members had gradually stopped making public appearances, therefore resulting in less information about them.

Kaoru spoke up while smiling wryly.

"I don't suppose the Witenagemot withheld the "truth" as result of enlightenment by the Campiones' "threat level," did they?"

"It would surely be a wise move on their part. Were my master to find out her information was on the net, she'd probably issue orders to completely destroy all computers existing in the world. Moreover, she'd probably put her grand fists to task, reducing the internet to a relic of a past age."

"You don't sound like you're joking at all."

"This is no joke but solid truth."

The casual conversation turned to the Devil Kings, the Campiones.

Given the trio's identities, it came as no surprise that the topic naturally shifted towards matters in these circles.

"Reading this over again, there's even fewer reports on Madame Aisha than

Her Eminence."

"Virtually nothing is known about her apart from the fact that she has withdrawn from the public eye."

"Ah yes, that person huh..."

"Oh dear, Lu-kun, could it be possible that you actually know things about this mysterious female Devil King?"

"I suppose you could say that. But there are many things in this world which are better left unknown. It's not something happy to talk about."

"I see. I guess it's another person belonging to that group."

"When one needs to adhere to prescribed courses of action even for things like this, what kind of suffering has this world come to?"

Ignoring the two History Compilation Committee members' laments, Lu Yinghua operated the touchscreen to display the section for [Cult Leader Luo Hao].

"Age, gender, birthplace, appearance—all 'NO DATA' huh? Yes, I guess this might be enough to guarantee personal safety... Oh wait a minute, one must be insane to write this sort of thing here."

"Is something wrong, Lu-kun?"

"Not just wrong, this will lead to a massacre. Look here, to think someone would dare apply their own labels onto Master's authorities."

Lu Yinghua pointed to a passage of text.

This section recorded Cult Leader Luo Hao's use of the [Divine Might of Vajrapani]. The information collected by the Witenagemot was organized into categories with the key points summarized.

The passage concluded with "This ability is hereby named [The Power]."

"It is customary for the Witenagemot to come up with provisional names for the authorities held by the various Campiones..."

"That's fine for other Devil Kings, but Master has already bestowed proper names for her own authorities."

"So those divine might something or other and whatever howl are names she came up with herself!?"

"Master is not going to allow revisions to these names. The people who wrote this could very well lose their lives."

"Why hasn't Her Eminence's subordinates reported this back to her?"

"That's only natural. The person who reports this kind of news to Master will be the first one to face her wrath. I'm definitely not doing it. But then again, someone might accidentally let slip from their mouth..."

"What an unexpected time bomb that could blow any time..."

"The problem is when the news might reach Her Eminence's ears..."

Learning of this bad news, Kaoru and Amakasu murmured together.

"By the way, Lu-kun, compared to Marquis Voban's authorities, it seems like Her Eminence's authorities number much fewer. Is there any particular reason for that?"

"Well, that's merely an illusion."

Yinghua answered Kaoru's query with a bored expression.

"It only appears that way because Master only used very few authorities in Japan last time. In actual fact, Master possesses all sorts of terrifying powers rivaling Marquis Voban."

"Terrifying powers?"

"For example, there's an ability that improves the fortune of the city she is residing in, resulting in rapid development, or one that could turn the entire world into something like a field of flowers."

"A field of flowers?"

"The first would produce immense economic and political consequences, but is your second example really that dangerous?"

"Based on your description just now, it seems to be an authority that causes flowers to bloom on dead trees?"

"It's not simply dead trees. Flowers can bloom from anything including stones

and concrete, burying all the streets completely. Furthermore, these are no ordinary pretty flowers but could go as far as to produce poisonous flowers and man-eating plants."

"Woah. Not only will it result in the total paralysis of traffic, but also a realm of decay where streets are filled with dead people."

"Even without express intent, Master would subconsciously cause little flowers to sprout on occasion."

"So how broad in range can this deadly field of flowers extend?"

"If Master were to get serious and devote time to it, she could probably cover up all the islands of Japan? Besides, none of the Devil Kings place too much emphasis on the number of authorities. After all, this is not a decisive factor in victory."

Yinghua's knowing look caused Kaoru to turn her gaze towards him while going "Oh really?"

"But I believe that having a range of different abilities allows one to react effectively against all sorts of opponents. Rather, I should say it helps eliminate weaknesses."

"Having a tough time against a poorly compatible enemy can be considered a staple of battle."

Rather than responding to Kaoru's question, Yinghua's wise words seemed to imply he was enjoying a battle of wits instead.

On the other hand, Amakasu interjected with his irresponsibly frivolous tone of voice as always.

Thus he spoke to Lu Yinghua:

"Well, because they are the type to use whatever is at their disposal without regard. Although they will make effective use of their powers no matter how many or few they have, having more does improve the odds when the time comes."

Amakasu discussed the matter of godslaying Devil Kings with a slightly gloomy gaze.

"However, I don't really think these people actually care about whether their compatibility against their enemy is good or bad, or whether their opponent is stronger than them or not. Besides, most gods are stronger than the Campiones."

Yinghua stood up and spoke with a tired tone of voice.

"Although my master is unparalleled in the human realm, there exist tons of war gods whose martial arts surpass her. Magic is also nothing but little tricks in front of the divine powers of gods... Someone who keeps worrying about the strength of enemies are just not cut out to become a godslayer. Should an opportunity arise, let's ask Honored Uncle himself."

Leaving these words behind, the young master of Hong Kong's Lu family left the shop.

Always busy, he apparently had various things to do afterwards.

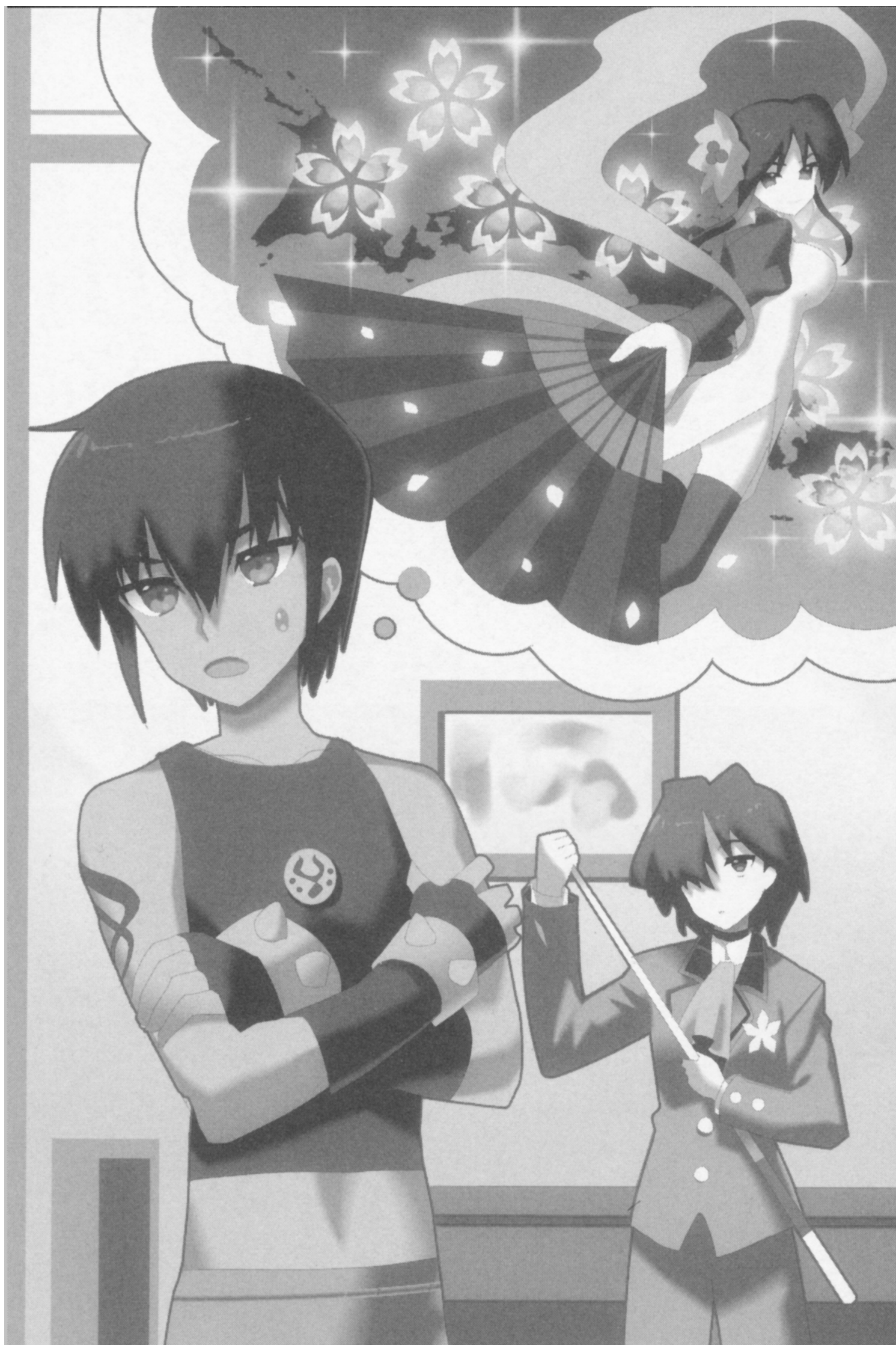
"Godou-san, do you ever care if your enemy is strong or weak?"

"Of course I would. After all, if a battle is unavoidable, of course a weaker opponent would be better."

Roughly thirty minutes had passed after Lu Yinghua's departure.

Kaoru posed the question to Godou who had arrived at the shop as if substituting for Lu Yinghua's absence.

After giving an answer that contradicted the demonic cult leader's direct disciple's assertions, the seventh Campione began to grumble.



"But for some strange reason, I keep encountering enemies who are stronger than me."

"Hey, Kusanagi-san. If that's the case, couldn't you choose to not fight those kinds of enemies?"

The one who interjected was Amakasu.

"This isn't the legend of Miyamoto Musashi. I would rather fight only enemies who are weaker than I am."[\[Z\]](#)

"That's very true, but then again, well, even if the enemy turns out to be stronger than me, it's not like I will absolutely lose for sure. So I guess the distinction isn't that important."

" "....." "

"Eh? What's the matter?"

Godou was puzzled to see Kaoru and Amakasu exchanging glances.

"Ah, it's nothing. Just a feeling of verified speculation, that's all."

"For a normal person, the distinction is quite an important one. But for you to give this kind of answer, it is truly worthy of the great Devil King."

As the boss smiled wryly, the subordinate shrugged with an expression of feigned innocence.

On the other hand, Godou stared blankly, completely baffled by the question's purpose.

Chapter 7 - Various Reminiscences

On a certain day during the latter part of January, Kusanagi Godou made a visit to Area 3 in the Chiyoda ward.

His destination was the Sayanomiya residence. This mansion, belonging to the Sayanomiya family, was also an important facility for the History Compilation Committee. However, its master was not at home today.

Instead, Godou and two members of his circle were currently in the mansion's study.

"Are you heading back already, Seishuun?"

"Yeah. It's not good to be away from home for too long. It's better to show up at school once in a while."

"Rather than 'once in a while,' school is a place where you should be going every day."

Amakasu shrugged in response to Seishuun Ena's cheerful answer.

The premier HimeMiko's life was normally supposed to be centered around Saitama prefecture's Chichibu city. After visiting Okutama for certain reasons yesterday, she had spent the night in Tokyo and was about to return home. As a special agent of the History Compilation Committee, Amakasu Touma was responsible for driving her back.

Godou intended to have a casual chat before she went home, but her exchange with Amakasu prompted him to think of something by chance.

"Perhaps it's something that only occurred to me now, can I ask a question? What high school do you go to in the first place, Seishuun?"

Seishuun Ena was always wearing an unknown uniform. Godou had heard that it was her high school's uniform.

However, Ena regularly left civilization because she needed to purify her body and mind frequently, deep in the mountains. Naturally, she was unable to attend school every day.

This was basically the "I'll go to school whenever I have time" kind of attitude that high school students should not have.

Godou had heard that the school pursued a policy of tolerance towards this type of outrageous attendance in fear of the overwhelming influence wielded by the Seishuuin family.

Ena's family was a prestigious house in the Japanese wizardry circles, a family with a military tradition that counted generals from the Warring States era among their ancestors.

The bright and cheerful HimeMiko was actually a highly sheltered "ultimate Yamato Nadeshiko."

"It's a very small school in the mountains of Gunma. Chichibu... is located inside the boundaries of Saitama prefecture. Even if you drove at full speed, it takes about an hour to reach the nearest city."

"So students really are able to attend school properly in that kind of place."

Godou asked Ena another question while she giggled.

"I suppose there won't be transportation like trains of course. Are there any school buses there?"

"No, none of that at all. People from town basically get to school by walking or biking. Those who had enough of that would move into the dorms in the mountains. But Ena was basically driven by car most of the time."

"Well, the majority of students do choose to live in the dorms..."

Amakasu muttered with a slightly bitter expression.

"Although called a nearby 'town,' it's basically just a rural town deep in the mountains after all. It doesn't even have a convenience store."

"Apart from the small grocery store Grandma runs, there are no other shops."

"Sealing high school students away deep in the mountains for three years,

right when they're easily drawn to having fun, this is all done to isolate them from all entertainment so that they may focus on their studies. That school is literally like a tiger's den."

"Ahaha. Speaking of which, Amakasu-san also graduated from that type of school, right?"

"Eh?"

Godou was quite surprised by this unexpected piece of new information.

"Amakasu-san, you also studied in that crazy kind of deep mountain school too?"

"Yeah. It was a private school funded by the History Compilation Committee. The school was established to accept members of the Seishuuin, Sayanomiya, Renjou and Kuhoudzuka families or young adults with certain magical or martial arts abilities, allowing them to become agents or staff of the Committee after they graduate."

"Basically, it's similar to Railway High or the National Defense Academy of Japan?"

"Something like that. However, the school's actual situation is more like..."

In stark contrast to Ena's happy smiling, Amakasu was still making a bitter expression.

"Heard of the Nakano School?"

"I think it's a school that was used specially during the war to train spies, right?"

"I guess I don't need to ask that it's no Shaolin Temple?"

"Of course."

"What about Mount Kouya?"

"That just reminds me of stuff that appears in manga. I don't know the details very much."

"Oh well, roughly one third of that area consists of similar educational facilities."

Amakasu's explanation seemed to make sense but was still incomprehensible.

"Because it's basically a place used for training subordinates for related organizations, the tradition was that only the Four Families and various HimeMiko would enroll. But nowadays, it's completely different."

"Ahaha, well, about that."

Despite the subtly critical gaze coming from the special agent who called himself a subordinate, Ena continued to speak cheerfully, completely unfazed.

"The various HimeMiko study in so-called 'prestigious' schools so it's quite difficult to request that they adjust attendance requirements. But over in the mountains, it's much less troublesome, all it takes is for Grandma to ask for a favor."

"As an upper-class daughter, why don't you just attend Lilian Girls' Academy properly?"

Amakasu groaned mournfully as a low-ranked member of the organization.

As usual, Ena ignored these words and changed the subject by going "Oh right, by the way."

"Speaking of attendance, you haven't shown up at the Swordfighting Association lately, Amakasu-san? The guys over there said so, asking Ena to drag you there by force this time."

"Th-Those are quite some sudden and outrageous words."

"Swordfighting Association?"

"It's an association devoted to martial arts training for History Compilation Committee members in the capital region as well as officers in the police and JSDF who have contact with 'that area.' It's like club activities or something. Ena always makes sure to attend when visiting Tokyo every time."

Ena explained to Godou who was puzzled by an unfamiliar term.

'That area' meant people who frequently dealt with things like wizardry and gods.

"Please don't talk about that kind of dangerous gathering as you would

describe a dessert club, okay?"

Amakasu sighed while grumbling.

"That gathering takes place in a training hall with bamboo swords that are decorated super fashionably with pitch black tips. That threshold is really too high for a weak and cultured man like me."

"Why is it pitch black?"

"The front of that type of bamboo sword is equipped with a 'blade' made from hard sharkskin. If you get hit by a thrust, that thing stabs right into the body."

"...Bamboo sword?"

"Yes. Despite being a bamboo sword, it can pierce the human body. The pitch-black color comes from the stains left behind from dried blood."

"...So they don't wear stuff like protective gear?"

"Even wearing it doesn't provide complete protection for the body. Particularly dangerous is the special move that attacks the lower jaw while simultaneously delivering a fatal stab to the throat. Besides, even with bamboo swords, blows inflicted on protective gear can still fracture skulls and rupture eardrums."

"..."

Godou could easily imagine tragic scenes just from these brief descriptions. However, even as a girl who frequently took part in these gatherings, Ena remained cheerful as always.

"Well, that's basically what so-called kendo is supposed to be about. Not only limited to attacking each other with bamboo swords but also using leg locks, kicks and body slams. Weapons like the naginata are also used sometimes too."

"At least I've never heard of that kind of kendo..."

"It dates back to before the war. Somehow, it became mixed together with jujutsu. It's a product of the cruelty during the Meiji, Taishou and early Shouwa periods when bloodshed and physical punishment can be laughed off as jokes."

While explaining, Amakasu made another bitter expression.

"After the war and Japan's defeat, under General Headquarter's orders,

excessively dangerous Japanese martial arts were substantially toned down. However, the History Compilation Committee back then had several dozen experts in that area as martial arts instructors."

"So those people founded the association that Seishuuin mentioned?"

"Yes. I believe the core consisted of masters originally belonging under the Metropolitan Police Department. Did you know? Forced to disarm by the Meiji Restoration's ban on swords, the majority of accomplished swordsmen became police officers."

"That's not for the sake of using swords in battle, right?"

"Probably something similar to providing martial arts training to police officers all over the country. Back then, swordsmen acting as instructors were known as 'Gekken Sewakakari.' Because they were unable to make a living elsewhere, rivalries between the Hokushin-Ittourneyuu and the Jikishin-Kageryuu sword schools were finally set aside when hiring talent..."

Godou stared wide-eyed in response to the profound story Amakasu brought up from his wide knowledge.

"In the end, over excessive martial spirit and techniques dating from before the war were inherited directly and passed down the Swordfighting Association. I really wish they could be considerate for the people who are being forced to participate."

"How should I say this? My condolences..."

"Don't worry, there's no problem. Besides, Amakasu-san is actually quite strong."

"Please don't summarize things in such a careless manner. More than 60% of the participants in the Association are much stronger than me. You can't say there's no problem at all."

Godou still felt he could understand why Amakasu did not want to participate in the Swordfighting Association.

Furthermore, he was reminded of something. At the garden party at the end of last year, there was a group of people acquainted with Ena and looked like

martial artists. Surely, they must be members of this Swordfighting Association.

"Seishuuin... aside, I never thought that Amakasu-san went through the same kind of trials..."

Godou muttered with heartfelt emotion.

"Life sure is tough for students studying at schools in the deep mountains."

"Oh well, it's quite easy to deal with once you're used to it."

"Speaking of which, Amakasu-san, were you a high school student when you first met Kaoru-san?"

"Roughly that time. I remember I had just graduated from that place and becoming a university student in Tokyo. Oh well, in any case, my life was dramatically turned upside down ever since encountering her."

Amakasu shrugged as he answered Ena's additional remark.

"Back in my student days, my dream was to get a well-paid job involving little work on my part."

"Don't go calling that kind of plan a dream. However, I can understand in various ways. As expected, for someone like Amakasu-san who works in this kind of special occupation, there was a past experience that differs from an 'ordinary person.'"

Everyone had a past. In response to the mutters of Godou's heartfelt reaction, Amakasu began to make a wry expression for some reason.

"For you to make such a comment, Kusanagi-san, shouldn't you have an even more colorful past instead?"

"What are you talking about? My past is extremely ordinary, that of an elementary and middle schooler you can find anywhere off the street. I've never gone through any 'training' like Erica, Seishuuin or the others."

Since childhood, Ena and the girls had received an elite education in magic and martial arts.

Godou stated his position as a representative of ordinary people who did not go through such unusual childhoods.

"Sure. However, there's something that's bothered Ena for a while already."

Ena suddenly interjected.

"Despite Your Majesty constantly calling yourself 'ordinary,' Ena feels that you already became used to fighting very early on. Think about it, when Your Majesty first fought Verethragna, you kept exposing yourself to danger and finally, Your Majesty unbelievably faced off against the god of victory in a duel."

"..."

"Perhaps Your Majesty already became good at fighting a long time ago? From the first moment, Ena felt that Your Majesty could not be underestimated even ignoring the Campione matter."

"W-What are you talking about, Seishuun? I've always been a pacifist since a long time ago."

Of course, Godou instantly expressed denial—Or rather, he omitted the precise wording, because it involved matters he did not wish to touch upon.

Kusanagi Godou. Height: 180cm. Tall physique since a long time ago. By middle school, he was already a relatively famous baseball player and often called the fourth hitter who held the key to victory. Even now, he still remained confident in his dynamic vision that allowed him to track fast balls. Definitely not muscle-bound all over, but suitable parts of his body such as his back and arms were quite thoroughly trained...

Through experience, Godou had come to know how he could make effective use of these physical characteristics in certain situations, including rather regrettable cases.

Indeed. For example, during his middle school days, there was one time when his baseball team went on an excursion for a training camp.

His rather simple-minded longtime friend, Miura, the talented pitcher, had gotten into a conflict with local delinquents.

Under those conditions, bringing Miura back to camp by all means necessary became Godou's mission.

First of all, he had to apply appropriate force to calm down the raging Miura.

Next, in order to escape from the local delinquents whose anger remained unappeased, a slight amount of counterattacking was necessary as dictated by the circumstances. To avoid leaving lingering problems behind, he also had to take care in concealing his own identity...

Godou continued in his attempt to wander his maze of memories.

He realized that there were actually quite a number of similar incidents.

Godou coughed drily once.

"Well, so that's that. There are also times when I temporarily put pacifism aside, but for me to voluntarily abandon pacifism proactively—I don't think that could possibly happen."

"Here you go again. Clearly there's never a shred of hesitation whenever an emergency arises."

"L-Let's put aside the truthfulness of that for now."

Ena giggled as usual while Amakasu smiled as though he were about to say "This is known from all sorts of investigations."

"From what I've heard, Kusanagi-san, you were quite a famous baseball player. Like being chosen to represent Japan and heading to compete overseas in Taiwan."

"I wasn't representing Japan, just regions like Tokyo or Kantou."

Because Godou was perfectly comfortable with this portion of his past, he recounted rather fluently.

"Members were chosen from junior baseball leagues to form the Kyushu Team, the Hokkaido Team, the Tohoku Team, etc, to participate in an international tournament. Though seriously, I guess representing Japan wasn't totally a delusion."

Due to recalling these insignificant achievements, Godou smiled wryly while he spoke.

In actual fact, a team had been assembled to represent Japan at the U15 World Baseball Tournament.

However, Japan gave up participating due to political instability in the host nation.

There were far too many nostalgic memories.

"Perhaps I was more talented than the average person, but back in my baseball days, I really was just an ordinary player you could find anywhere. Please don't bring up weird things."

"Eh, you're asking about Godou back in his baseball days?"

In response to Liliana's question, Tokunaga Asuka went "hmm" and entered deep thought.

The current location was the cafe along Hongou Street where Kusanagi Godou lived. Seeing her sitting at an open air table, Liliana invited Asuka to join her.

Asuka happened to be having coffee while browsing a magazine.

This was a general sports magazine centered on interviews of athletes. Because the cover happened to feature a baseball player, Liliana suddenly brought up the question she had just asked.

What kind of player was Kusanagi Godou who competed in this sport in the past?

"Precisely because it's him, naturally, you can't call him an ordinary player."

"Putting it that way is definitely correct."

"Well, I don't really know much about the technical aspects, but very clearly, he definitely did not give off an impression of 'a baseball youth you could find anywhere' for sure."

Sitting face to face with Liliana, Asuka spoke with a bored expression.

"Basically this. He's like the kind of villain you find in baseball manga."

"...Why do you say that?"

"Despite clearly capable of winning recognition through ability alone, he gives off an impression with a fatal lack of openness. Although Godou was still only a middle schooler, he already mastered how to play baseball with his smarts, such

as tempting the opposing team to target him in order to create openings, then using those openings to keep them in check, completely defeating the enemy's pitcher and batting lineup."

Kusanagi Godou was both the fourth hitter as well as the catcher who acted as the team's playmaker.

With a knowing tone of voice, Asuka told Liliana about his superb skills.

Judging from her liking for sports magazines, Asuka understood baseball more than average high school girls.

"Then there were the times when he had one-on-one matches against his rival, Miura-kun the pitcher. Although Godou always struck out on his first and second times at bat, he would never fail to start making spectacular hits by the third time, roughly. It makes me feel that his considerations use the entire match to defeat his opponent rather than individual times at bat."

He competed against the opponent by using smarts in addition to the body.

Indeed, this was a very interesting anecdote very much in Kusanagi Godou's style. Asuka continued:

"That guy doesn't put up much of a performance in the beginning of a match when there are no runners on base. But whenever the chance comes, he'll make a good hit to rack up the points. And then there's the habit of being strangely capable of manipulating the pitchers."

"Now that you mention it, indeed, there seems to be..."

With Erica Blandelli foremost of all, along with Seishuui Ena and Lu Yinghua.

Standing by the young Campione's side were all these geniuses with unbridled personalities.

Kusanagi Godou's ability to lead and have them follow instructions could very well be described as his hidden skill.

Recalling this, Liliana nodded once vigorously.

"Precisely because he was that kind of player, he was widely known and even selected to represent Tokyo and Kantou. However, Godou himself simply says

'people like me are a dime a dozen, right?' I know it's a frequent occurrence, but his self-portrayals have never been reliable at all."

Murmuring slightly indignantly, Tokunaga Asuka concluded her reminiscences.

Chapter 8 - Kusanagi Godou and the Monster of Okutama

Cast

Kusanagi Godou

Erica Blandelli

Mariya Yuri

Liliana Kranjcar

Seishuuin Ena

Amakasu Touma

Female Announcer

Opening

- **Narration by Liliana in monologue style.**

Liliana: "Ever since time immemorial, humans have circulated myths about gods through oral tradition."

Liliana: "On rare occasions, these gods would manifest in the world. Freed from the restraints of the stories known as myths, gods would roam the earth as they pleased, bringing calamity wherever they traveled."

Liliana: "We magi call these gods 'Heretic Gods.'"

Liliana: "Humans are unable to oppose gods. Even by gathering the entirety of human strength and wisdom, it would be far enough to match a Heretic God."

Liliana: "Nevertheless, there exists people in the world who possess enough power to fight gods."

Liliana: "They are the godslayers. Having slain gods as humans, they are the Devil Kings who have stolen divine authorities from the gods. We call the seven of them 'Campiones.'"

Liliana: "Next, I will recount a story about the youngest of the seven Campiones, Kusanagi Godou."

Liliana: "But please remember, even though Campiones are warriors who fight gods, they are absolutely not defenders of mankind. They are Devil Kings in the truest sense, tantamount to Pandora's Box where all disasters and a sliver of hope are gathered..."

Part A

- **Kusanagi Godou Talks About Peace**

Godou, Erica, Yuri and Liliana are gathered together, chatting.

Godou: "It's a bit sudden, but it's great to have peace."

Erica: "Is it really sudden? However, I do share hopes for world peace..."

Godou: "What's wrong, Erica?"

Erica: "The word 'peace' doesn't suit you at all, Kusanagi Godou. You are a Campione, a Devil King who slays gods and usurps their authorities. You're more of a harbinger of war and chaos, an enemy of peace, instead."

Godou: "Don't make me sound like a devil. I'm an authentic pacifist."

Erica: "This Japanese sentence is off in meaning. You mean self-proclaimed pacifist, don't you?"

Godou: "Drop the self-proclaimed."

Erica (to Yuri): "Hey Yuri, say something. You'd be hard pressed to find someone like Godou, so far removed from peaceful life, probably less than one in ten thousand."

Yuri: "Nothing of that sort, Erica-san."

Erica: "No need to worry about his opinion. It's time for Godou to confront his position properly."

Yuri: "It is not out of worry. Just as Godou-san says, he will not make a big deal out of things unnecessary. I would consider him someone who loves peace."

Godou (happily): "Mariya..."

Yuri: "Be that as it may, he often acts imprudently. Despite his lofty ideals, he often forgets them as soon as he springs into action. Even so, he has no initial

intentions of threatening peace."

Godou (greatly shocked): "Mariya!?"

Erica: "How's that? Although there are slight discrepancies in the details, Erica Blandelli and Mariya Yuri are essentially in agreement."

Godou: "Wait. Think carefully. I haven't caused any disturbances lately, right? I haven't fought a god for long time now... What's wrong? You're showing such weird gazes."

Erica: "Sorry. I think your words have already betrayed you."

Yuri: "I feel compelled to bring forth a rebuttal. Godou-san, the last time you fought a god was less than twenty days ago."

Godou: "Yeah, it's almost a month with no incidents. It's great that things are so peaceful lately."

Erica (whispers): "Speaking of which, there is a saying, the 'Hundred Days of Napoleon'..."

Yuri (whispers): "An analogy for transient glory, lasting merely a hundred days..."

Erica (whispers): "But it's still five times longer than Godou's peace..."

Godou: "I haven't needed to fight anyone for so long. At this rate, reaching a month shouldn't be a problem. Liliana, what do you think?"

No answer.

Sound Effect: a pen writing

Godou: "Liliana, what have you been doing starting a while ago?"

Liliana (startled): "Sorry. This is the report I have to submit for this month."

• Liliana's Report

Godou: "A report to submit where?"

Liliana: "To submit to the association I belong to, the [Bronze Black Cross]."

Godou: "A secret association of magi... So what's in the report?"

Liliana: "Kusanagi Godou—A report on you. This is research material written for future generations of magi, to inform them of the beings known as Campiones, godslaying Devil Kings."

Godou: "Future generations will study us!?"

Erica: "Why of course. Speaking of Campiones, they are potential threats on the same level as Heretic Gods. Whether revering and worshiping them or fleeing in terror, it's not a bad thing to have more information."

Yuri: "Better safe than sorry."

Liliana: "As the first publication this time, I will start with compiling basic information on Kusanagi Godou and those in his service."

Godou: "Don't write anything weird, okay? Like misrepresenting the truth."

Liliana: "As an official document, of course that is forbidden. For example, this is the information on me: Liliana Kranjca, age sixteen. Foremost knight in Kusanagi Godou's service, also the housekeeper in charge of all of His Majesty's personal affairs..."

Erica: "The truth was misrepresented the moment Lily called herself your foremost knight."

Liliana: "No matter how you look at it, I am the one most suited to this title, right?"

Erica: "Of course not. This should be written there: Kusanagi Godou's right hand and foremost knight, who is also his lover... is Erica Blandelli."

Godou (exasperated): "Don't go writing 'lover' in official records."

Erica: "A simple description that captures our relationship, what's wrong with it? ...(seductive whispers) Hey Godou, don't you think that this report ought to record our romantic life of loving sweetness in detail?"

Godou (panic): "I-I-I don't think so. Also, stop blowing in my ear!"

Yuri: "E-Erica-san, please refrain from acts of impropriety. Godou-san, you ought to be more resolute."

Liliana (to Yuri): "By the way, the information on Mariya Yuri is as follows: A

HimeMiko, the name given to users of special powers dating back to ancient Japan. Possesses the power of spirit vision at an outstanding level. Assists His Majesty through appropriate counsel."

Yuri: "You are writing about me too?"

Liliana: "Naturally. You are one of the comrades supporting Kusanagi Godou."

Yuri: "You speak too kindly of me—(bashfully) what supporting..."

Liliana: "Prudent and gentle in personality. Versed in flower arrangement and various performing arts in addition to mastery of all domestic chores. The quintessential Yamato Nadeshiko, the Japanese ideal of a woman since antiquity."

Yuri: "I am not as excellent as you say..."

Liliana: "But extremely naggy. Has a habit of lecturing others. Often provides honest advice to deter Kusanagi Godou against inappropriate behavior. Extremely effective too. His Majesty frequently bows his head and apologizes to Mariya Yuri, vowing never to make the same mistake, etc."

Yuri (startled): "Liliana-san, are you actually writing such content into an official document!?"

Liliana: "To provide information to later generations of researchers."

Yuri (squirming in embarrassment, unable to speak properly): "???x?!"

Godou (originally trying to speak on Yuri's behalf but finally gives up): "No... Well, it's true that I often bow my head and admit my mistakes whenever Mariya reminds me of undeniable things..."

Erica: "Fufu, come to me and I'll spoil you instead."

Godou: "Like I said, stop sticking so pointlessly close to me!"

Liliana: "Indeed. Although it is regrettable for Erica, I have no choice but to write: a vixen who frequently deceives His Majesty. I honestly hope you could rein in your ways."

Erica: "My goodness, Lily. Adding your own subjective bias to research materials is truly unlaudable. Your profile should be written like this: Liliana

Kranjcar has a bad habit of frequently running amok when her emotions get carried away. The one who always cleans up her messes is her childhood friend, Erica Blandelli."

Liliana: "Stop pretending you are my friend. There is nothing but ill fate between us."

Yuri (trying to calm them down): "So, are you going to write about Ena-san too?"

Liliana: "Oh right. I have not written it yet, but she is one of us too. —Seishuuin Ena. The premier HimeMiko wielding the divine sword, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Often stays in mountain forests to purify her body and mind..."

Godou: "By the way, what did you write about me?"

Erica: "This is the most crucial."

Liliana: "Yes, roughly the following."

Sound Effect: rustling of paper

Godou: "Let me see... Kusanagi, the seventh and youngest Campione... Surpassing a top-class hurricane in destructive power..."

Erica: "The harbinger of calamity in human guise..."

Yuri: "The incarnation of chaos, bringing destruction and turmoil everywhere visited..."

Godou: "What the heck is this!?"

Liliana (dodging the question): "M-My humble apologies. In trying as much as possible to depict the truth without inserting my personal emotions, it turned out this way."

Erica: "Speaking of which, indeed, all of it is the truth."

Yuri: "Well, you could put it that way..."

Godou: "What are you talking about? This is misrepresenting the truth. Reality rewritten into a fictional story. This is not a correct record!"

Sound Effect: Slamming the table

Godou: "I know myself best. I'll write this report myself!"

- **Everyone Working on the Report Together**

Godou: "...Then I'll start with a self-introduction. Uh, my name is Kusanagi Godou. An ordinary first-year high school student you can find anywhere."

Sound Effect: Wrong buzzer from a quiz show

Erica: "Isn't that wrong right off the bat?"

Yuri: "It is a bit much for Godou-san to assert himself as 'ordinary' given his position."

Liliana: "Always running away from who you are is one of your flaws."

Godou: "Why? My body is just a bit special, but I'm basically still an ordinary human, right? My personality is serious and I don't have any weird hobbies."

Erica: "Just a bit...? If struck by lightning from the gods, an ordinary person would have died, incinerated until only bones were left."

Yuri: "In Godou-san's case, he would revive matter-of-factly."

Erica: "That kind of vitality already counts as an immortal monster."

Godou: "Then forget about the body, just stick to the mind!"

Erica: "The same applies."

Yuri: "I believe it is the same too."

Liliana: "I suppose it is no different. If one were to call your mind very 'ordinary,' it would be equivalent to describing the blue sky as 'not blue.'"

Godou: "It's that outrageous!?"

Erica: "Since Godou's self-description is this unreliable, I shall be the one to introduce Kusanagi Godou's terrifying battle accomplishments."

Godou: "Quit it with the terrifying."

Erica (narrating tone of voice): "The god he slew in the beginning was Verethragna, the war god from ancient Persia. A god of light, capable of transforming into ten incarnations, obtaining victory on all sorts of battlefields."

After Godou usurped the [Ten Incarnations] authority from Verethragna, he made his grand entrance as a godslaying Devil King..."

Godou: "Grand is redundant."

Erica: "Within merely half a year after that, he engaged in numerous battles against gods. Melqart the ancient Phoenician sky god, Athena the goddess of war and wisdom, Perseus the hero, Sun Wukong the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Lancelot du Lac the prototypical knight... The price paid for these legendary deathmatches was often leaving behind marks of heavy destruction in the surroundings. As a result of Kusanagi Godou's authority, the Roman Colosseum was demolished, Milan lost Castello Sforzesco, and a number of historical landmarks in Japan were tragically wrecked—What's wrong, Godou? Your face looks unwell?"

Godou: "Nothing much... I just feel a stomach cramp from remembering my past deeds."

Erica (playfully): "You reap what you sow."

Godou (brief groaning)

Yuri: "Please hold on. It is true that Godou-san has done many things open to criticism."

Godou (another brief groan)

Yuri: "However, he has done things for others too... He did save me in the past."

Godou (revitalized): "I know, right!?"

Yuri: "There was fighting a fellow godslayer, Marquis Voban, for my sake, the incident involving my younger sister, and facing off directly against that terrifying Cult Master Luo Hao."

Liliana: "Indeed. Compared to those fiendish Devil Kings, Kusanagi Godou could be considered a benevolent messenger of justice."

Yuri: "Nevertheless, there are aspects to him as captured by the saying 'danger past, God forgotten' as well as excessive profligacy in female relationships, how troubling... Especially regarding female matters, I do occasionally feel that an

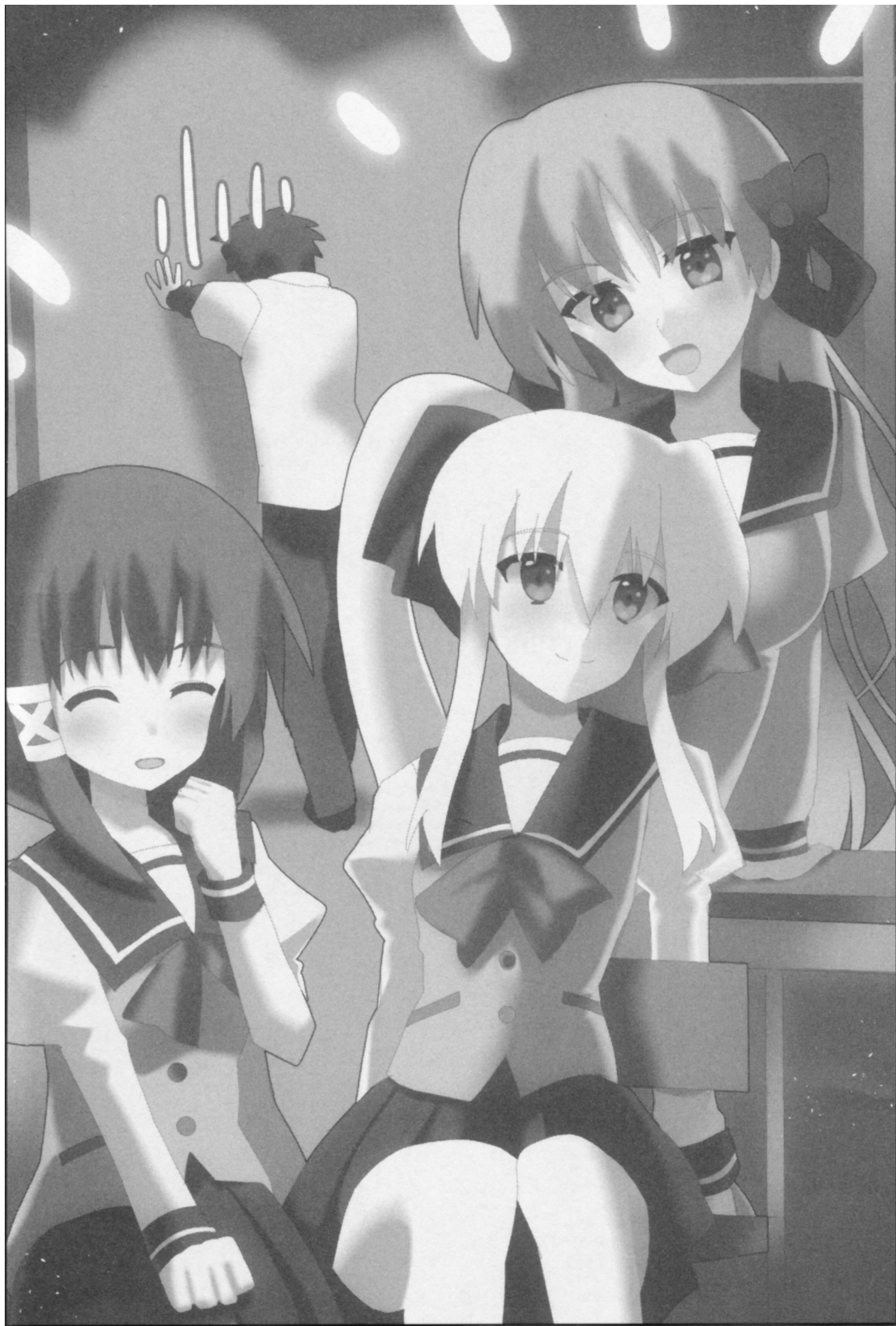
actual stab with a knife would do Godou-san some good..."

Godou (troubled): "Eh!?"

Yuri: "His relationship with Erica-san goes without saying, but no sooner had I looked away than he had already developed an excessively intimate relationship with Liliana-san. Even my younger sister's relationship with him has become a bit strange, truly troubling. Furthermore... (voice lowered) with me, he even, umm... (followed by murmured words) It became that kind of relationship, how troubling. Be that as it may, I still would like to support him with everything in my power..."

Godou (in trepidation): "Mariya. I tried to refuse, but I suppose I was forced by the situation in a battle against gods and there were all sorts of reasons. Even though coming from me, it sounds..."

Yuri (suddenly stern and righteous): "Please hold your tongue. It is too cowardly for the man to say such words. It is virtually the same as smearing mud upon your own face."



Godou: "Y-Yes ma'am."

Liliana: "Speaking of female relationships... Actually, I was still hesitating whether or not to add information in this regard to the report."

Erica: "Isn't this obligatory? When discussing the human nature of Kusanagi Godou, I believe this aspect is unavoidable."

Godou: "Wait a sec. Rather than the question of whether it's obligatory, regarding the existence of problematic female relationships, to begin with, I—"

Liliana: "You cannot deny their existence, right?"

Godou: "...Even if I can't deny their existence, it's not like I can assert their existence either..."

Liliana: "This sort of ambiguous answer is sufficient. (Sigh) I have personally experienced your behavior on this front more poignantly than anyone else..."

Godou: "Hey, what do you mean by personally experienced..."

Liliana: "Have you forgotten that day at Naples? (lowered voice) You were on the seaside road at the time, disregarding the gazes of onlookers, you took my lips and—"

Godou (hastily interrupts): "I do admit that it was due to my lack of moral training, or perhaps going with the flow too forcefully, or rather, it was after we reached the consensus that it was a necessary process to defeat a god. Anyway, it was my bad, so please stop talking about it in front of everyone."

Erica: "By this point, there's no need to hide it anymore, right? Everyone present has had similar experiences... On our first encounter, never in my wildest dreams did I expect you to be such an absurd man."

Yuri: "Godou-san usually acts no different from a person with common sense..."

Godou: "Hey, I believe I'm someone with common sense and acts prudently at all times."

Erica: "Only you think that."

Liliana: "Only in your mind."

Godou: "Rubbish. All of you are leaning too heavily on assumptions and speculation when talking about me. You've got to take a proper look at the real me."

Erica: "A proper look is fine... But I doubt our opinions will change as a result, okay?"

- **Narration by Liliana in monologue style.**

Liliana: "The next day after this conversation, Kusanagi Godou proved his claims wrong through his own behavior. However, we were not surprised. Kusanagi Godou is a Campione after all. An unruly godslayer..."

- **Ena's Invitation**

Godou, Yuri and Liliana are walking along a road.

Sound Effect: noise from heavy traffic

Godou: "Where did that Erica go off today?"

Liliana: "I heard she was busy so she left first."

Yuri: "Well, she is quite busy indeed."

Sound Effect: cellphone ringtone

Godou: "It's my phone... How rare, it's Seishuuin calling."

Liliana: "Seishuuin Ena huh? She is not currently in Tokyo, right?"

Yuri: "That is correct. She apparently set off to Gunma Prefecture two days ago."

Godou: "Anyway, let me pick up first."

Sound Effect: switch-on beep

Godou: "Hello?"

Ena on the phone: "Are you free right now, Your Majesty? If it's okay with you, can you come help out?"

Godou: "Feel free to explain if it's something I can help with... But nothing violent. I've already had almost a month of peaceful days. If possible, I'd like to

spend the next few decades peacefully like this, passing on at a ripe old age on a tatami mat."

Ena on the phone: "Here you go again~ That's so unlike Your Majesty's style."

Godou: "Why does everyone like to link me to conflict so much..."

Ena on the phone: "Because Your Majesty always denies it verbally, but you actually love to revel in battle and go on a rampage. Isn't this what they call tsundere?"

Godou: "Where did you learn that word from..."

Ena on the phone: "That's not important. Just as you predicted, there's actually a violent matter that needs Your Majesty's help... Please, just help out a bit! It's safeguard your 'peaceful life.' If you leave it alone, Tokyo will be in big trouble."

Godou (immediately): "For real? Tell me the details."

Part B

- **Mountain Forest in Okutama**

Ena, Godou, Yuri and Liliana are walking on a mountain trail.

Sound Effect: Birds calling, twigs getting stepped on and other noises from walking in the mountains.

Godou: "This place is really out in the woods."

Ena: "Far from it. This place is quite near human settlements... But for Yuri, it's quite tough, right?"

Yuri (panting): "I-It is fine. I-I can still hang in there for a while..."

Liliana: "Allow me to support you if you are tired. Do not push yourself too far."

Yuri (panting): "Th-Thank you..."

Godou: "Let's take a break nearby first."

Yuri (deep breath): "Sorry..."

Sound Effect: birds chirping

Ena: "Up to yesterday, I was deep in the mountains on the border between Tochigi Prefecture and Gunma Prefecture, tracking down a centipede monster."

Godou: "By centipede, you mean the type that crawls all over the place?"

Ena: "Yes, but not the normal size. Ena didn't get a clear look at its size, but from head to tail, it probably exceeds twenty meters."

Liliana: "Obviously no ordinary creature."

Ena: "It also seems to be a divine beast."

Yuri: "A minion serving a god... And bearing a centipede's form..."

Godou: "But divine beasts are clearly weaker than gods, right?"

Ena: "Ena and Liliana-san would barely be able to defeat it, but Your Majesty probably could take it out with ease. However, this centipede dug a hole in the mountain and stays underground almost all the time. It's impossible to catch."

Liliana: "That is understandable since the prey is underground."

Ena: "It digs long and deep tunnels all over the place, causing mountain foundations to become loose, it's terrible. Landslides could easily occur. Yesterday, it started moving towards Tokyo. Right now, it's in this mountain."

Godou: "Even if you bring up Tokyo, this area is all wilderness in the mountains."

Ena: "Digging tunnels deep in the mountains is already troublesome enough. At this rate, even urban areas will have holes dug all over the place, which will be even harder to handle. It's best to defeat the monster before that."

Godou: "Got it. I guess I'll help out in this kind of situation too."

Ena: "As expected of Your Majesty, that's more like it!"

Godou: "However, why would a centipede be a divine beast—a servant of a god? I never thought of it as an amazing creature."

Ena: "Well—There's actually an unexpectedly long history behind the centipede being a divine messenger."

At this moment, a spirit vision descends upon Liliana.

Sound Effect: Sound of gentle breeze like ringing of bells

Liliana (solemnly): "Ever since ancient times, the centipede has been the symbol of mines in Japan... The long and narrow tunnels dug in the earth were compared to centipede legs. Hence, the centipede became a deity for people related to mineral veins—"

Ena: "Liliana-san, you know about it too?"

Liliana: "No, but a spirit vision suddenly descended and I received an image of the centipede's god. The spiritual presence of the divine beast lurking in this mountain must have stimulated my spirit senses."

Ena: "Oh okay. It's just as you say, Liliana-san. The centipede is the messenger for gods of iron, copper and other metals. The famous Bishamonten also uses the centipede as a minion."

Godou (profoundly): "It's like searching information on the internet. What a convenient power."

Liliana: "It does not activate at all times and it is very limited... Speaking of which, Mariya Yuri, your spirit vision powers are much stronger than mine. You should be able to obtain even more useful information, right?"

Yuri (seriously): ".....Yes. Over there."

Godou: "Over there eh.. Looks like there's some kind of reason."

Yuri: "If you walk over there, you will surely encounter the divine beast."

Ena: "Good job, Yuri. You've found out the centipede's location through spirit vision."

Godou: "Great, let's head over there."

• **Prepare for Battle?**

Sound Effect: everyone's walking noises

Ena: "Come to think of it... Next comes the battle, right?"

Godou: "Yeah, I don't like it, but it's probably coming."

Ena: "Then Your Majesty needs a weapon, right?"

Liliana: "Indeed it is as Seishuuin Ena says."

Godou: "I don't need something so dangerous. Like I keep saying, people who carry swords and Japanese blades around to swing randomly... It's time for them to understand that Japan has laws regulating firearms and swords."

Ena: "No, not that."

Liliana: "Indeed, it is not that kind of weapon."

Godou: "What? (suddenly realizing in panic) No. No no no, I don't need any kind of weapon at all. Don't you agree too, Mariya?"

Yuri: "Eh!? (troubled) How should I put this...?"

Liliana: "Then I shall be blunt. To prepare your weapon—specifically, the 'spell words of the sword' is the intent."

Ena: "The power Your Majesty uses is the [Ten Incarnations] usurped from a Persian deity, right?"

Liliana: "The warlord Verethragna is the god of victory and emissary of the sun as well as the defender of royal authority and the populace. Wielding ten incarnations, he fights by constantly changing forms..."

Ena: "First of the ten incarnations is the howling wind, then the bull, the white stallion that transports the sun, the ferocious camel, the fearsome boar, the fifteen-year-old youth, the flying raptor, the ram and the goat..."

Liliana: "Finally, there is the warrior who wields a golden sword."

Ena: "Just like Verethragna, Your Majesty can use the sword when taking on the warrior's form. However, it is not a sword to be swung by hand."

Liliana: "It is a golden sword controlled using spell words, for tearing gods asunder."

Ena: "Using the [Ten Incarnations] requires fulfilling strict conditions. And the condition for transforming into the sword-wielding warrior is—"

Liliana: "Obtaining detailed knowledge of the target deity."

Godou (intending to dodge the issue): "I-Is that right?"

Liliana: "It is futile for you to feign forgetfulness. For the purpose of obtaining knowledge about a god, back in Naples, did you and I not... kiss repeatedly?"

Godou (gives up): "Yeah..."

Liliana (turning slightly seductive): "As an ordinary student, Kusanagi Godou does not have knowledge about gods. However, the usage condition is resolved by having us magically transfer knowledge to him. Hence, this has already happened many times so far..."

Godou: "But morally speaking, it's awful!"

Liliana (slightly seductive and shy): "It cannot be helped. Kissing is a means to

apply magic.. It has always been the case so far... I have no problem with it this time too."

Godou: "What do you mean by you have no problem with it!?"

Liliana: "Naturally, the act of imparting knowledge to you. Fortunately, I already received the requisite image through the earlier spirit vision..."

Godou: "It's more like I have a problem with it, okay!?"

Ena: "Hold on, in that case, Ena has no problem either."

Godou: "There are problems everywhere, okay!?"

Ena: "After all, the enemy is a Japanese deity. Compared to a foreigner like Liliana-san, it's only natural that Ena would have a better understanding as a Japanese miko."

Liliana: "I have already obtained sufficient knowledge. This does not constitute enough reason."

Ena: "Who can say? Perhaps after performing the act, you'll realize it's still no good. It's better to be more careful in times like these, so best to let Ena do it."

Godou: "There's no best or second best. Do you agree, Mariya!?"

Yuri (distracted, startled by the sudden question then answering frantically): "W-What is it!?"

Godou: "Mariya, could you tell them off? A battle is about to start and it's not the time to squabble over such things."

Yuri: "Y-Yes. Please stop arguing, the two of you! Just as Godou-san said, a dangerous battle is at hand, how can you still have a dispute over such matters..." (gradually decreasing volume) Godou (feeling puzzled): "W-What's wrong?"

Yuri: "Oh nothing. I simply feel that it is precisely because a dangerous battle is at hand that they are having an argument over this issue..."

Godou: "You've got a point but it's irrelevant now!"

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Godou: "Is that the divine beast? (quietly) I'm saved. (loudly) I'm heading off

first!"

Sound Effect: sprinting noise against the ground

Ena: "Hey wait, Your Majesty! The sword's not ready!"

Liliana: "There should be limits to recklessness! No helping, everyone, chase him!"

Yuri: "Godou-san!"

Sound Effect: running footsteps

Godou: "Uwahhhhhh!"

Sound Effect: soil and sand collapsing

Yuri: "Kyahhhh!"

Liliana: "Guh!"

Ena: "Everyone be careful!"

- **A main road in Tokyo's city center**

Erica was walking along the road.

Sound Effect: bustling metropolis

Sound Effect: cellphone ringtone followed by button press

Erica: "How rare. I can't believe you called me, Amakasu-san."

Amakasu on the phone: "Something unexpected happened. Rather than drowning while grasping at straws, I thought it'd be better to seek your help, Erica-san."

Erica: "Is this a request from Amakasu Touma as a special agent of the History Compilation Committee?"

Amakasu on the phone: "I'm not brave enough to request your help for private matters, Erica-san... Just as you know, our work involves damage control and concealing information when incidents related to gods or magic take place in Japan."

Erica: "In other words, there's another big incident. And Kusanagi Godou is

involved."

Amakasu on the phone: "It saves me a lot of effort since you understand so quickly."

Erica: "I last saw Godou less than a quarter of a day ago... That guy is unbelievable. I take my eyes off him for a moment and he does something so unexpected."

Amakasu on the phone: "Actually, it's related to Ena-san on our side, who's currently participating in a mission to defeat a mysterious centipede-like monster that's moving south towards Tokyo."

Erica: "Allow me to guess the rest? Considering Ena-san, she probably used this as pretext to call Godou to her and let loose."

Amakasu on the phone: "Correct. She's together with Kusanagi-san at Okutama to hunt the centipede."

Erica: "Then perhaps this phone call is an invitation to a date?"

Amakasu on the phone: "Much obliged. Going to a festival alone would be too lonely, so could you grace me with your company?"

Erica: "If you could take me to the venue, of course it's okay."

Amakasu on the phone: "That would be a great help. I'm actually near you already."

Sound Effect: car engine and horn

Sound Effect: Erica hanging up on the cellphone

Sound Effect: opening and closing of car door then car driving away

Erica (speaking from front passenger seat): "As expected of you, Amakasu-san, what thoughtful arrangements. Truly an exemplary Japanese ninja."

Amakasu (slightly depressed): "Could you stop calling me that...? Wouldn't that put me in the overworked businessman category..."

Erica: "Is that so? Speaking of which, how about watching television or listening to the radio?"

Amakasu: "Why?"

Erica: "Since it's Godou, after all. If given half a day's free time, it wouldn't be strange even if he caused New York to collapse. I wouldn't be surprised if his latest movements were reported on the news."

Amakasu: "That's really true."

Amakasu turns on the navigation system's 1seg television.

Sound Effect: television switched on

Female Announcer: "Now reporting on the latest news. Roughly an hour earlier, a large-scale landslide has occurred at Onihakamura in the Tama Area of Tokyo Prefecture. In addition, eyewitnesses have reported an explosion of unknown origin—"

Erica: "A master detective would declare 'the mystery is completely solved' at this point. Without needing an investigation, the culprit can already be confirmed."

Amakasu: "What a coincidence, I feel the same way too. Anyway, let's head over to the scene in the news... If only the battle would be over by the time we get there, that'd save a lot of work."

Erica: "In that case, Amakasu-san, please pray for my misfortune."

Amakasu: "What do you mean?"

Erica: "I, Erica Blandelli, was born under a star that miraculously ensures that I always enter the stage in time to give a spectacular performance on occasions like these!"

Sound Effect: car engine

- **Underground**

Godou (painfully): "Oww... Where is this? It's so dark."

Sound Effect: feeling around for belongings

Godou: "I'm so glad I brought a flashlight just in case..."

Sound Effect: click

Godou: "Is this underground? And there's a path? A cave... No, it's an old

tunnel or? (suddenly noticing) Mariya!"

Mariya (still a bit hazy): "Mm... (awakens) Godou-san!"

Godou: "Are you okay?"

Yuri: "Y-Yes. I am fine."

Godou: "So terrible just now. A crazy big centipede burrowed out of the soil, causing the ground to collapse over a wide area. That was when we fell underground.": Yuri: "Where are Ena-san and Liliana-san?"

Godou: "Haven't found them yet. They probably fell somewhere else... Where exactly is this place?"

Yuri: "I can sense powerful spiritual energy from the surrounding soil. This is most likely a tunnel dug by the centipede divine beast."

Godou: "Really? If more tunnels get dug in urban areas at this rate, stuff like buried electricity lines and pipes are gonna fare badly. Then there's subsidence and soil liquefaction... I've got to put a stop to it around here."

Yuri: "Then, in other words..."

Godou: "Yeah. I'll defeat that centipede here. Help me out."

Yuri: "V-Very well... Then there is no choice. Umm, well, uh, shall we begin?"

Godou (surprised): "Begin what?"

Yuri: "Umm, well... Godou-san, you intend to fight, right?"

Godou: "Yeah."

Yuri: "And I am the only one here. (shyly) Then naturally... The responsibility rests with me. To (ambiguous mumble) with Godou-san, the task of imparting knowledge regarding deities to you!"

Godou: "Huh!?"

Yuri: "Actually earlier... Ena-san and Liliana-san's dispute was undoubtedly too imprudent and slightly lacking in propriety; however, I did agree in my thoughts that it is a job that someone must be responsible for!"

Godou: "Huh!?"

Yuri (sternly): "I am fine with it. Since you, the king, wish for my assistance, I will assuredly fulfill my duty."

Godou: "No no! There's no need to think about obeying a Campione or a king. In any case, all of my peers are problematic characters with twisted personalities!"

Yuri: "Then I shall amend my words. I, Mariya Yuri, wishes to aid Kusanagi Godou in a personal capacity."

Godou (gulps): "Mariya..."

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Liliana's voice (battle cry): "Hahhhhhh!"

Ena's voice (battle cry): "Yahhhhhh!"

Godou (quietly): "Saved again. (loudly) Liliana and Seishuuin are fighting over there, let's go!"

Sound Effect: rushing footsteps

Yuri (trying to stop him): "Godou-san!"

• Traveling by car in Okutama, Erica and Amakasu

Sound Effect: car engine

Amakasu: "Night has totally fallen."

Erica: "I feel kind of hungry."

Amakasu: "Want to grab a bite somewhere? This area is all mountain roads and they serve excellent *kamameshi*, which is basically rice, meat and vegetables stewed in a small pot."

Erica: "Is this common food on mountain roads?"

Amakasu: "It's functional beauty in Japanese travel. Let's stop and eat if we find a kamameshi shop later."

Erica (very interested): "But we're only twenty minutes from the scene, right?"

Amakasu: "Yes, what a shame."

Erica: "Then isn't it time for us to display the Japanese spirit of industriousness?"

Amakasu: "Since it's Kusanagi-san we're talking about, he's probably gotten started long ago by now. Since we won't make it either way, let's fill our stomachs before getting to the scene."

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Erica: "Did you hear that just now?"

Amakasu: "Unfortunately, with perfect clarity."

Sound Effect: emergency braking and car swerving

Erica: "Looks like fate has allowed Erica Blandelli to arrive in time again. It appears that my daily acts of virtue have bested yours in providing favorable fortune."

Amakasu: "Now that you put it that way, Erica-san, I feel as though fate is quite unreasonable."

- **Inside the mountain at Okutama**

Godou and company had somehow escaped the labyrinthine network of subterranean tunnels

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Sound Effect: distant rumbling of thunder then the sound of a lightning strike

Liliana (battle cry): "Hahhhhhh!"

Ena (battle cry): "Yahhhhhh!"

Sound Effect: clanging of swords

Sound Effect: monster's howling and heavy machinery digging

Liliana: "Curses. It escaped underground again!"

Ena: "It runs away like this every time we attack after waiting for it to surface. After asking His Majesty out to help at last, we still can't beat it!"

Godou: "Even if you want to use my power, I don't know where it's hiding

underground. No helping it, let's go underground again..."

Yuri: "That would be very dangerous. You would end up buried alive if you fight in that kind of place. The ground could easily collapse right now, right?"

Godou: "That's true..."

At this moment, Erica and Amakasu hurry to the scene.

Amakasu: "Hi everyone. It's great you're all safe."

Erica: "How rare to see you at wit's end against an opponent of this level, Godou!"

Godou: "Erica, you came too!?"

Erica: "Indeed. How is the current situation?"

Sound Effect: soil and sand collapsing

Godou: "Again!?"

- **Underground, only Godou and Erica**

Sound Effect: something similar to a subsidence accident in a mine. Gradual return to silence.

Godou: "...That's basically the situation."

Erica: "Understood. Confronted with a monster that lurks underground, you're out of ideas how to proceed... But how unexpected, to be sent underground like this so suddenly."

Godou: "This underground tunnel was dug by that giant centipede."

Erica: "This tunnel is long and complicated, almost like a subterranean labyrinth. Where did the others fall?"

Godou: "I think we're the only ones who fell down."

Erica: "In any case, Godou, we're the only ones here right now."

Godou (warily): "Yeah..."

Erica: "Then I'll take on the job of preparing the sword. (chuckling adorably and seductively) Fufu. Look forward to a passionate kiss after so long, okay?"

Godou: "Isn't this too big a jump in topic?"

Erica: "I simply omitted the rambling discussion. Godou, you don't like wasting time either, right?"

Godou: "Even if you don't want to waste time, don't go omitting everything!"

Erica: "Then let's be more methodical. Godou, you wish to defeat that divine beast, don't you?"

Godou: "If it gets to urban areas, it'll be a great disaster."

Erica (increasingly seductive): "However, the cunning enemy flees underground... Even a Campione is having trouble taking it out..."

Godou: "Yeah, that's right. So it's been a pain this whole time."

Erica (instigating): "If the divine beast were to escape this time, what kind of tragedy awaits Tokyo...? You are the only one who can stop it, aren't you, Godou?"

Godou (faltering): "Well yeah, but even so, kissing here..."

Erica (diabolically tempting): "This is for the sake of protecting everyone's peaceful city, isn't it? Godou, I hope you'll put some effort into your admirable aspirations. Please kiss me. For the sake of imparting knowledge of that divine beast to you."

Godou (entranced): "Erica..."

Erica (whispering lightly in his ear): "Acquiring an additional weapon is nothing bad."

Godou: "Yeah, I guess...? (committing resolve) This is for victory..."

Erica: "Indeed. For your victory, I shall offer my lips to you. Hence, you must defeat the monster and prove a Campione's power. Please..."

Godou: "Yes, I will—(suddenly calms down) Wait a sec. On further thought, that centipede is a Japanese god."

Erica (smiling): "Apparently so."

Godou: "Liliana saw what kind of god it is just now through spirit vision, but Erica, you can't do that, right? Aren't you unclear on that centipede's origins!?"

Erica: "How astute of you. As expected of the one I love."

Godou: "You were trying to trick me!?"

Erica (smiling tenderly): "Please call it taking advantage of the situation a little."

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Godou: "The centipede is close by... The situation is already so troublesome and yet you're still harboring weird intentions."

Erica "Is that so? I don't think it's troublesome at all."

Godou: "Do you have a battle plan?"

Erica: "Yes, all you need to do is this. Listen to me—"

Sound Effect: Erica's explanation is drowned out by the monster's roaring halfway

Godou (greatly surprised): "I never would've thought of that."

- **Already night on the ground surface**

Yuri, Liliana, Ena and Amakasu are worrying about the two who fell underground.

Ena: "It's already been twenty minutes since His Majesty and Erica-san fell underground."

Liliana: "We should go down to search too."

Amakasu: "There's the risk of a second collapse. I'd suggest not."

Yuri: "I hope the two of them are fine..."

Erica suddenly returns alone.

Erica: "So everyone is here? Wonderful, I found you straight away."

Liliana: "Erica! Just you? Kusanagi Godou is not with you!?"

Erica: "We fell down together but split up afterwards. Oh Amakasu-san, about what you mentioned earlier..."

Amakasu: "Kamameshi on mountain roads?"

Erica: "Yes, I'm hungry. How about we all go for some food?"

Yuri: "Erica-san! Godou-san is still underground!"

Ena: "...A strange sound is coming from below the ground... Could this be His Majesty's doing?"

Erica: "Presumably. As expected of Godou. Once he releases the brakes, he pushes the battle immediately to the final stage."

Sound Effect: monster's roar, persistent explosions, metallic impacts and other noises of intense battle from afar

Yuri: "Releases the brakes...?"

Erica: "I told him already."

Flashback to Erica and Godou's conversation underground. Playback effect applied.

Erica: "Here's the crux of the matter, Godou. Don't worry about what comes next, just go rampage as much as you want."

Godou: "If I let loose here, I'll get buried alive, right!?"

Erica: "But that won't kill you, given who you are, after all. Of course, that doesn't apply to the rest of us, so we'll standby on the ground. We'll just find you later when you're buried then dig you out. So go ahead and rampage to your heart's content."

Godou: "I'm the one who's getting buried, so stop with the reckless talk... However, I never would've thought of that."

Back to the present.

Liliana: "That is far too reckless. Even for a Campione, getting buried alive in these tunnels, as complicated as a labyrinth, guaranteeing safety would be... (unable to say the word impossible) still possible..."

Ena: "It works. Doable. After all, it's His Majesty. He definitely won't die."

Erica: "We should be able to dig Godou out safely after confirming his location using magic later."

Yuri: "Chances are quite high now that you put it that way... But is it really

okay?"

Amakasu: "That being said, it definitely won't work for ordinary people."

Sound Effect: monster's roar

Amakasu: "But he's the great Devil King who can even slay gods, so this is fine, I guess?"

- **Underground, Godou v.s. giant centipede**

Sound Effect: monster's fierce roaring

Godou: "I'm getting tired of underground hide-and-seek. I'm gonna take out you right here... For victory, hasten forth before me. O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion! O stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bring forth the halo of thy master!"

Sound Effect: thunderous firing sound

- **Amakasu's car racing along a mountain road**

Sound Effect: car's engine on overdrive

Amakasu: "Anyway, we've left the mountain where the centipede was. How are things on that end?"

Liliana: "Bad news. The sky is still very bright even though it is 8pm."

Ena: "Yeah, the sun just rose from the east."

Erica: "Naturally, that is no sun but the white stallion, one of Verethragna's incarnations... Beautiful as a true sunrise. Visually only."

Yuri (tone as though praying to heaven): "The incarnation of flames, only usable against great sinners who cause hardship to the populace... It is descending upon the earth again..."

Ena: "That giant centipede has caused enough mischief all over the place. Perfect!"

Amakasu: "However, isn't the firepower too great to use this kind of finishing move to bring solar flames to the ground? It's like killing a chicken with a

bulldozer. Total overkill."

Sound Effect: light speeding through the air with a whoosh

Amakasu: "The white stallion flying west from the eastern sky, carrying the dazzling sun. This legend, brought to Japan in the east from England in the west, circulates in various places all over the world. As for the motif of a sun horse, only very few people know that it started spreading with the migration of Indo-European tribes... By the way, if you don't want to listen to this kind of content, I'd be happy if you fast forwarded..."

Ena: "Amakasu-san, what are you talking about?"

Amakasu: "Just escaping a bit from reality. However, there's nothing wrong with escaping from annoying reality right now. Cleaning up the aftermath is our job..."

Erica: "Sealing off the scene of the incident, concealing the truth, releasing fabricated misinformation... The History Compilation Committee has so much work. Allow me to express my sympathies on this regard."

Sound Effect: an extremely large explosion

Ena: "Wow! What an outrageous explosion!"

Yuri: "One third of the mountain... No, half it was annihilated by the explosion... (worrying about Godou's safety) Godou-san, please be safe."

Erica: "Don't worry. Probably... No, he'll surely be fine."

Yuri: "I-I am thinking the same too, but it does not sound right to voice it directly."

Ena: "Don't worry, Yuri. That's the kind of person he is."

Yuri: "However!"

Ena: "There, there. (grinning) His Majesty has to be like this after all!"

Liliana: "You seem quite happy..."

Ena: "Because, don't you find this very exciting? His Majesty is probably the only one who can make Ena not bored to this extent. As expected of Ena's husband!"

Erica: "Someone with common sense and acts prudently huh? Seriously, Godou, you always act the opposite of what you say."

- **Narration by Liliana in monologue style.**

Liliana: "What happened afterwards is much less important."

Liliana: "Of course, the giant centipede was incinerated to ash by the white stallion's flames. The mountain where it was hiding had half its mass blown away, resulting in a major change in landscape. Nevertheless, this could only be considered minor damage in comparison to a Campione's serious fight."

Liliana: "Buried alive, Kusanagi Godou was rescued by our power. Naturally, he was completely unharmed, saying 'I thought I was a goner' when reuniting with us. However, that was simply a passing thought without a single instant when he actually felt the danger of dying."

Liliana: "In any case, I hope everyone will learn from this incident."

Liliana: "Campiones are the mortal enemies of gods. They are the warriors who fight Heretic Gods on mankind's behalf. Nevertheless, they are absolutely not mankind's protectors."

Liliana: "They are the unruly Devil Kings. Pandora's Box where all disasters and a sliver of hope are gathered. Kusanagi Godou has told us this fact in a very simple and easily understood manner."

Chapter 9 - A Gathering of Godslayers in the Fog Capital

Part 1

A gust of wind was blowing across the vast wilderness.

Totally dry. Whether the atmosphere or the land, there was no humidity at all.

Blown by the dry and powerful wind, yellow sand and soil was swept continually into the sky. As far as the eye could see, it was a land of endless wilderness and rocky hills.

Be that as it may, it was merely a sight afforded to mortal eyes.

For Luo Cuilian, who was capable of using clairvoyance as naturally as breathing, even the impoverished villages a hundred miles away were within sight.

It was currently near the end of winter. Although spring was arriving in the southern lands of the Qing Empire, the wind here was still cold and harsh.

After all, her current location was higher than the many tall mountains in the Qing Empire—even higher than their peaks—the land of Tibet.

"To think you would choose this wilderness for the unique moment of your passing..."

Luo Cuilian spoke to her old friend.

"King of the Iron Wheel, this is truly your style indeed."

"Humans are ultimately born as solitary beings."

The old man replied hoarsely.

"As such, a time of passing in solitude is sufficient... One must ultimately return to the long journey of reincarnation cycle."

The old man was sitting on a rock, wearing a yellow monk's habit.

The habit, resembling tattered rags, was proof of a life as a virtuous priest.

Emaciated to the extreme, his body was clad in nothing but this garment.

He was not even wearing straw sandals. His skin was as yellow and dry as the desolate landscape while there was so little flesh remaining on his face that it resembled a skull.

Practically skin and bones, the old man was reaching the end of his life, quietly waiting for death's arrival.

A renowned monk born in this land of Tibet, he was also a martial arts master.

There was almost no one in the mortal realm who could surpass his divine skills. Naturally, the Ruler of the Martial Realm, Luo Cuilian, was the lone exception.

"Your Eminence. Looking back, fate directed our paths to cross in various ways both favorable and unfavorable."

"Indeed you are correct. I am the leader of the orthodox faction in the Chinese martial realm while you ruled over the Western Region's martial artists—"

Recalling various commotions in the past, Luo Cuilian murmured:

"Our fists crossed on several occasions, while other times, we fought as comrades."

"Hahahaha, this humble monk's martial arts could hardly compare to yours."

Luo Cuilian was currently the leader of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains in addition to standing at the pinnacle of the Chinese martial realm.

However, she used to be just the leader of a single school of martial arts.

Although the female-only Flying Phoenix School under her command was an orthodox and prestigious establishment, it was definitely not mainstream in the martial arts community.

Nevertheless, Luo Cuilian wielded peerless martial prowess and influence.

More importantly, she had usurped multiple "authorities" from gods—A trump card that no amount of training or miraculous skills could match. Before they knew it, the heroes and outlaws of the martial realm came to regard Luo Cuilian as the supreme master, pledging their undying loyalty to the one and only "king."

That had taken place ten-odd years earlier.

Recalling that was when she had last seen the King of the Iron Wheel, Luo Cuilian nodded.

"Yes, I came precisely for the sake of this mysterious destiny. I left the convent at Brunei in response to the letter that expressed your wish for a final meeting before drawing your last breath."

Luo Cuilian recounted indifferently but she was definitely not dressed for travel.

Instead, she was wearing loose and comfortable Han clothing, no different from everyday attire. Given her mastery over Daoist arts, even a long-distance journey from a remote island in the Qing Empire's southern sea to Tibet would be no different from "a stroll to a neighboring village."

"Then upon this mysterious destiny... May this humble monk voice request a wish?"

"Of me?"

"It is a task impossible to accomplish by anyone but Your Eminence."

"Please state your request. It is known far and wide that the King of the Iron Wheel, hailing from the Western Region's martial realm, never speaks in vain. I know this all too well."

After hearing what the old monk said, Luo Cuilian immediately agreed.

Had these words come from a subordinate in the Holy Cult, she would surely have denounced him for being impudent and proceeded to conjure magical wind from a weak breath to blow him away to the far side of the sky.

Hence, the King of the Iron Wheel pressed his palms together and spoke sincerely.

"Much appreciated. Actually, it is a matter regarding westerners... The British."

"So their reach has extended beyond China's territory, even to Tibet."

Luo Cuilian frowned slightly.

The Qing Dynasty had enjoyed prosperity during the rule of its sixth emperor,

the enlightened monarch, Qianlong. Luo Cuilian's birth had taken place towards the end of his reign.

Since then, sixty-odd years had elapsed.

Luo Cuilian's appearance had not changed at all from her time as a maiden in the flower of youth. However, the Qing Empire had fallen into turmoil, going into steep decline as though rolling down a mountain.

Westerners, the British Empire in particular, were precisely the culprits.

To eliminate the opium smuggled in from that country, the Qing Empire had shut down trade.

However, this led to a war against the British, ending in defeat. Trade was reopened. Consequently, opium addicts littered the streets of the Qing Empire.

Ten-odd years passed after that, the Qing Empire declined more and more.

It was no longer capable of ruling over its vast territories. Finally, the rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom broke out in the south.

Currently, the Qing Empire—rather, the land of China—was in a period of chaos.

Still, nevertheless, Luo Cuilian would not entertain plebeian and short-sighted thoughts along the lines of "taking revenge against the British." She had not the slightest desire of that.

"I am the one who stands at the pinnacle of the martial realm and the Holy Cult. I have no desire to intervene in worldly matters such as the state's downfall."

Precisely because she wielded absolute authority, that was why she could speak so indifferently.

"If that turns out to be the nature of your request, I am afraid your precious dying wish is in vain. You ought to understand that clearly, I suppose?"

"Certainly. It would be unthinkable for this humble monk to act in such insolence towards the peerless Cult Master Luo."

A wry smile surfaced on the emaciated face of the King of the Iron Wheel as he

quietly continued:

"What this humble monk requests of Your Eminence... is to recover a stolen divine treasure."

"Divine treasure?"

Rejecting the worldly and the mundane, Luo Cuilian had chosen to live in seclusion on a remote island in the South China Sea.

At present, she had left that place to travel to a wilderness in the distant Tibetan plateau.

Furthermore, her story was about to begin in a foreign land.

Part 2

"Dejan, an interesting rumor has come to my attention."

"Oh? Is it a rumor that a well-informed man of your standing would feel obliged to report to me?"

Listening to the young Viscount Gerard, *he* muttered in response.

He was someone who held the title of "Marquis."

However, despite his noble heritage, this peerage did not come automatically through inheritance. It was part of the "spoils of victory" taken by force through his own strength, determination and talent—more than a hundred years ago.

That being said, he did allow such ferocity and valor to be expressed honestly in his appearance.

He enjoyed being regarded as a calm and rational person by others. In fact, that was the majority of people's impression of him.

Dejanstahl Voban—was this young man's name.

On the other hand, well-bred and gentle in character, the twenty-three-year-old Viscount Gerard continued:

"It's a rumor about you, after all."

The young Viscount winked in a joking manner.

"The Balkan guest sojourning in London here, a certain Mr. Dejanstahl Voban who is also my friend—not only trespassed Buckingham Palace but also strolled into Her Majesty Queen Victoria's bedroom openly..."

"Oh, that one?"

"Making a display of his inborn sense of humor, Mr. Voban revealed his various diverse interests... But very regrettable, Her Majesty did not confer her favor upon him."

"She should try harder to maintain composure."

Voban commented in a slightly joking tone of voice.

Having lived longer than any old man in this world, he looked extraordinarily young in appearance.

To others, he looked not a day older than a man in his late twenties. Furthermore, with silver hair combed neatly on his forehead and a seemingly melancholic face, his demeanor was always shrouded under a shadow of aloofness.

Both Viscount Gerard, as one would expect, and Voban were dressed as upper-class gentlemen.

Namely, black frock coats, white shirts, bow ties, top hats, canes, *etc.*

However, Voban's words were definitely not gentlemanly.

"Oh well, perhaps I was not considerate enough. Turning into a werewolf before Her Majesty without warning... Perhaps that might've been a little offensive."

"Just a little?"

"It occurred to me as means of amusement for us to pass time together... However, this whim of fancy ultimately failed my intentions."

"O heavenly child of pride and cruelty. That's more like you, Dejan."

Despite his personality as a gentle aristocrat, young Gerard uttered dangerous words.

"O Lord of Magi, worshiped by us followers of the magic path, Your Excellency the strongest Devil King. Although it is very problematic from an English noble's standpoint, as a seeker along the magic path, I find it very reassuring."

The twenty-three-year-old Viscount was actually a mage.

Whether due to young age or personality, he was extremely bold. Even when facing Voban who was revered as a "Devil King," he could still interact with his own unique attitude.

This was precisely how he had caught Voban's eye and become his trusted

confidant for the past two years.

Having only subordinates trembling in fear was not enough. Although this young man was insignificant as a mage, thanks to his personality, he possessed rather accomplished information gathering abilities.

As a side note—

The two of them were currently at Crystal Palace in the outskirts of London.

In the year 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations was held in London, the British capital. Built for the venue, the glass prefab palace was later moved to a suburban hill and converted into a theme park. Although admission fees were definitely not cheap, it was open to the general public.

The magnificent structure's roof and walls were all made of glass.

Bright and glittering was not all. Today was a sunny day, rare for London. The late February sun's rays were streaming into the Crystal Palace's interior through the glass.

This was all thanks to its traits as a building made of transparent glass.

A kind of gigantic greenhouse as well as a museum. Displayed inside the facility were cultural artifacts, artwork and plant specimens from countries all over the world.

This palace had only been opened for a few years.

Today, there were many visitors in search of exotic sights. It was quite hot and crowded in the palace.

"So, Dejan, why did you call me out here today?"

"You'd like to hear about rumors apart from me, right? Three days ago, someone sent me—this Voban—a *letter of challenge*. A man named Sir Brennan."

"A man who wants a duel with you? What a foolish bastard!"

After mocking him, Viscount Gerard began to contemplate briefly. Seeing his serious expression, Voban laughed and said:

"Hoh. It is uncertain whether that man simply overestimates himself. However, it is a rare and valuable event. Tell me in detail everything you know."

"Rare and valuable?"

"Yes, a man who dares to oppose Voban's authority... If possible, I sincerely hope he is someone with the strength to match me. It must be so."

Voban's lips curled in a grin.

"—Otherwise, there is no value in victory."

"Well then, I wonder if he will meet my expectations?"

Confronted with Voban's smile that was as fierce as a wolf's, Viscount Gerard could only smile wryly.

"Three months ago, a magic artifact discovered in Tibet and later brought to England fell into the hands of Sir Brennan—That is what I heard."

"So he relies on an artifact huh?"

"However, the artifact is quite troublesome. Reportedly, it grants its wielder the power of an oriental war god named Vajrabhairava. It seems to be a divine weapon."

"Hoh."

"A weapon that is reminiscent of something like the trishula. Rumor says it allows the wielder to freely control divine lightning."

The young and well-informed Viscount shrugged while explaining.

"However, veracity is as yet unconfirmed. I would advise you not to raise your hopes too high, my dear Marquis."

"No matter, I won't take it to heart at all."

However, this was a pastime too. Voban intended to agree to this foolhardy challenge.

The time was mid-nineteenth century. The British Empire was approaching its most prosperous era as a country. Two years had gone by since Voban had moved to this capital of London.

Migrating to this "Fog Capital" on a whim, life had brought suitable levels of excitement.

However, such excitement was gradually fading away, because Dejanstahl Voban was a man who frequently sought new amusements.

Furthermore, meanwhile simultaneously...

A certain girl was all fired up with motivation in front of a mansion located in Hampstead Heath in the outskirts of London.

Although he was a Devil King, Marquis Voban did not possess the magical power of clairvoyance.

Hence, of course, he was completely oblivious to this occurrence.

"Starting today, I shall begin my new job at a new house."

It was the verdant lawn in the mansion's garden.

The girl was standing alone here, clenching her fist forcefully.

She was wearing a maid's uniform. An apron dress of black and white. A headband worn on her head.

"Work hard and get paid handsomely."

Moreover, she was not Caucasian.

Born in a British colony—India—it was only later that she moved to British soil.

Hence, she had an olive complexion. A rather conspicuous appearance in London. She had started working as a maid since childhood, but after her master passed away from illness, she had taken the chance to go abroad.

Then her travels persisted for several months.

Finally returning to England, she turned over a new leaf and found a new place of employment.

Compared to a suspicious maid of foreign birth, most upper-class households preferred to hire English women. Hence, it was rather difficult for her to find work.

Fortunately, she had heard that this mansion's master was a bigshot unconcerned with such trivial matters.

For this master's sake, she must devote herself to her job.

The girl vowing in her heart was named Aisha. The mysterious noblewoman who would come to be known as the "Eternal Beauty."

Part 3

London's nights were dark and gloomy, despite the large number of gas lamps erected in streets all over the place.

This was a sight belonging only to the starting point of the Industrial Revolution, the great empire's capital which stood as its industrial heartland.

However, the flames burning within the glass cases on the very top of slender poles were quite small and weak. One could imagine the brightness accordingly.

Furthermore, London's urban areas were shrouded by exceptional smog.

What allowed Britain to become the world's biggest empire was the development of mechanized industry—and its power source, the steam engine, which required burning vast amounts of coal to drive.

In addition, ordinary families used firewood in their furnaces.

The chimneys of homes, factories and locomotives kept spewing black smoke nonstop.

Consequently, the smoke hanging over London's urban areas, combined with winter's heavy fog, gave rise to this famous "Fog Capital."

Even several tens of thousands of gas lamps would be insufficient to illuminate the night through this smog.

Voban loved these dark nights and filthy environment.

"Hmph."

Simply walking on a street at night made his lips twist naturally in a grin.

For Voban who had slain the sun god Apollo—thereby obtaining the wolverine authority of "darkness and the beast of the land"—the night's darkness felt comfortable to him.

Also, tonight was particularly cold.

No walking figures could be seen on the street.

The noise and bustle of people and horse-drawn carriages, unique to large cities—Such daytime imagery seemed almost like a lie. The surroundings were dead quiet.

A gentleman walked up to Voban while he was enjoying this peace and quiet.

"Lord Marquis... You grace me with your presence."

"Hmm, so you're Sir Brennan huh?"

The rendezvous point was "London Bridge."

A bridge of stone built on the River Thames, it was not only sturdy but also very massive.

A structure with an actual length of 310 yards (roughly 282 meters) and a width reaching 17 yards (roughly 15 meters).

As a side note, the famous nursery rhyme of "London Bridge is Falling Down" originated here.

Just as described in the lyrics, London Bridge was originally a wooden bridge that easily collapsed. However, it was rebuilt twenty years ago and now made of stone.

Fortunately, it did not collapse ever since.

"You are the one who sent the letter requesting a duel, aren't you?"

Voban jeered quietly.

"Sorry, but after reading it, the contents did not quite catch my interest. I was rather disappointed."

"Then allow me to make myself clear again, O Lord of Magi."

Sir Brennan was a middle-aged man. Roughly fifty or so.

He was also quite massively built. Standing six feet tall (roughly 180cm), he was almost the same height as Voban. However, he was quite plump and more than three times as stout as Voban.

The frock coat and shirt worn on his body were almost bursting at the seams.

"Lord Marquis, if anyone on earth were to be closest to the title of Devil King, it would undoubtedly be you. Nevertheless, many of your statements require corrections."

"Hmm, such as?"

"Insane boasts of having killed gods, the current blasphemy of searching for 'Heretic Gods' worthy of killing, as well as weird nonsense about no one on earth capable of opposing you."

"But it's all true."

"Hahahaha. Please stop being ridiculous."

Shaking his obese belly, Sir Brennan burst into laughter.

"But I did witness with my own eyes."

"What?"

"Gods manifesting upon the earth—The appearance of Heretic Gods and their authorities."

"....."

"Gods are truly powerful and terrifying. It is absolutely impossible for them to meet defeat at a human's hand. And to think you are shamelessly boasting of victory."

No sooner had the obese mage spoken than he shook his head.

"If anyone could accomplish the great feat of slaying a god, it would only be a fellow deity. Lord Marquis, though you may be a powerful mage beyond compare, you are still limited by a human body. This is precisely why I have challenged you to a duel."

To mistake a former vagabond who had never learned even the basics of magic for a "mage."

This man named Sir Brennan was truly blind. However, Voban suppressed his urge to mock and spoke in a rather gentlemanly manner: "I see now. If you manage to defeat me, it would prove that I, Voban, am merely a pitiful son of humanity—"

"Indeed. This will prove it."

Currently, there was no one on London Bridge apart from Voban and Sir Brennan.

Pedestrians and carriages crossing during the daytime frequently caused congestions here.

However, there was apparently no one bored enough to venture out on this bone-chilling night of fog. It was also possible that Sir Brennan had used magic to drive away the populace.

Voban surveyed the vast London Bridge while scoffing audibly.

People like Sir Brennan would show up once in a while, rejecting the existence of godslayers like Voban based on their half-baked knowledge. Voban originally had no interest in responding to this type of person, but this was a special exception.

Despite feeling displeased that his opponent for this duel was definitely too insignificant a character, Voban accepted it as within toleration for evening entertainment. Thus he spoke and urged: "So, Sir Brenna. Isn't it time you show me the trump card you took such great pains to acquire?"

"Oh my, you have already heard?"

"Were it not for the existence of this artifact, I would have ignored your invitation in the first place. You are truly a lucky man... No, perhaps it would be better to say you are unlucky."

"Dear me, if this was what secured my chance to have a duel against you, Lord Marquis—"

The challenger who overestimated himself began to laugh proudly.

"Then sure enough, I am in luck!"

Sir Brennan suddenly revealed an steel-crafted weapon in his right hand.

Summoned by magic. In Europe, this would be quite an exotic item. But for Voban who had traveled far and wide across the world, it was something he recognized.

A short rod made of steel, a foot (roughly 30cm) or so in length.

The rod's two ends were each split into three sharp prongs, almost like a fork. It was the the "vajra"—the weapon of choice for oriental monks wielding Buddhist magic.

A weapon with its ends split into three prongs, this was apparently known as the "three-pronged vajra."

A weapon of sorts. However, its role as a focus in religious ceremonies was far stronger.

"I see now. That's a weapon of the gods, huh?"

Voban nodded.

It was an artifact that an English adventurer had "brought back" from a historical temple from the Tibetan plateau. Sir Brennan had reportedly purchased it for a handsome price.

Even if Sir Brennan's abilities were top notch, he was ultimately just a human mage.

But if he were to possess sufficient determination to challenge Voban, perhaps —

"Awaken, three-pronged vajra! Om Vajra tishtha Hum!"

Sir Brennan suddenly chanted spell words.

Then the three-pronged vajra fired powerful lightning at Voban.

"Hoh."

Voban muttered indifferently.

The cheap apartments where working-class commoners lived would probably get blown away simply from the impact of this lightning strike. Furthermore, any surviving construction materials would burn intensely, resulting in the tragic incineration of the entire building.

Nevertheless, a godslayer's body possessed "resistance against divine power and magic."

The incoming lightning did not have the power to break through that

resistance. The instant it struck the wolf king's body, the lightning's heat and shock suddenly vanished.

Even so, Voban still narrowed his eyes. Indeed, the power was quite insufficient.

However, he could sense the potential hidden in the three-pronged vajra—A sliver of it.

"Hahahahaha! Don't tell me this is the end!"

Voban roared with laughter with a bestial demeanor.

"Totally not enough. Draw out even more power. Put your soul and entire being on the line to execute a full-powered attack against this Voban here!"

"You don't need to tell me that. I intended to do so from the start!"

Sir Brennan yelled. He was evidently growing anxious.

But even so, he still infused magical power, admirable in quantity for a human mage, into the three-pronged vajra. As one might expect, he was a master-class mage after all.

The three-pronged vajra shot lightning again towards Voban.

And not just a single strike. The second strike came close behind. Then a third, a fourth, a persistent release of lightning. However— The godslayer's body effortlessly dispelled all of these attacks.

The mage finally began to hyperventilate in shock. His flabby face turned pale.

Perhaps he finally recalled. His past encounter with a Heretic God, witnessing the despairing disparity in power, the scene of utter defeat.

"This is nowhere near enough, Sir Brennan."

Thinking this was not working, Voban decided to instruct his opponent.

Suppressing his fighting spirit, Voban spoke in a calm voice.

"A man of your level will never create lightning sufficient to harm me no matter how much magical power you pour in. Even with a divine artifact—a rare treasure of antiquity."

"Gah...!"

His will to fight was probably provoked by the opponent's taunt.

Sir Brennan gnashed his teeth in chagrin and released the fifth lightning strike. Dispelling it with casual wave of his hand, Voban spoke like a teacher at a lectern.

"There is a method to surpass limits. Namely, by consuming one's life."

"!?"

"The magical power stored in an ordinary human's body does not even measure up to a teardrop shed by a god... However, if you were to burn your soul with the majority of your lifespan as the price, it could become slightly stronger."

"What nonsense are you spouting!?"

"However, just think for a moment. If you fail to defeat me, then only death awaits you. Or rather, a pitiful death."

Voban's honest advice remained logical to the very end and rather cold.

He neither mocked the enemy nor gloated in his own victory. He simply wished to enjoy this battle as much as possible. Apart from that, he desired nothing, so he said indifferently: "At least, you ought to choose a manner of death worthy of your pride. How about it?"

"Curse you!"

Sir Brennan finally took new action.

He tossed the three-pronged vajra in his right hand upwards overhead. The divine artifact from the Tibetan plateau thus flew up to the sky— It stopped at a point in midair. With sparks erupting, it began to release lightning.

Suddenly manifesting over London Bridge was something akin to a small star.

"...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life!"[\[8\]](#)

Spell words filled with anger and feelings of humiliation.

Words from holy scripture about the sacrifice of life. Life energy, white in color, rose up from Sir Brennan's body of flesh and was absorbed into the three-

pronged vajra high above.

The obese body turned thin within the blink of an eye—His flesh atrophied.

In contrast, the three-pronged vajra's lightning output gradually increased. The brightness illuminated the darkness shrouding London that even gathering ten billion gas lamps would not defeat.

Abandoning his pride, Sir Brennan had taken Voban's advice.

In an attempt to fill the excessive gap in power, he gambled on a chance of one in ten thousand.

Enveloped in extremely powerful lightning, the three-pronged vajra descended upon Voban.

"...Let's reminisce a bit. It happened roughly seven years ago."

Voban raised his right hand to the sky and spoke quietly.

The three-pronged vajra and lightning approached from the sky. With a trail resembling a meteor's more than lightning's, it flew towards London Bridge, descending on the godslayer's head.

This three-pronged vajra—Voban casually caught it in his hand.

A ferocious bestial grin surfaced on the corners of his lips again.

"Back then, I met three gods while wandering in Asia. A trinity of gods, whose members governed wind, rain and thunder respectively. Those guys rained lightning down for fun... Yes, you achieved one tenth of their power, Sir Brennan!"

Actually, let alone a tenth, it was doubtful whether he even reached half of that.

Voban was deliberately flattering him while secretly snickering to himself. The lightning infused in the three-pronged vajra instantly disappeared. It was absorbed into Voban's right hand.

The massive glowing lightning that had lit up London's smoggy night was gone.

Having gambled everything on that attack, Sir Brennan was shocked to see that it had ended so anticlimactically.

Meanwhile, Voban toyed with the weapon while speaking quietly.

"Finally obtaining victory over the three gods, I usurped an authority from them. You are quite unlucky after all. In truth, I too... have some insight on the usage of lightning."

Calling forth winds and clouds, bringing downpours, summoning the descent of lightning.

An authority of "storms" usurped from ancient gods in Korea—Feng Bo, Yu Shi and Lei Gong.

By the time anyone noticed, the sky was filled with dark clouds. Large raindrops began to fall and turned into a downpour within the blink of an eye. Strong gusts of wind also blew.

Then the sky rumbled heavily and lightning began to descend.

A stormy night had arrived.

Whether wind, rain or thunder, none of it seemed like it would end that quickly.

Cleansing the metropolis of its filthy fog and darkness, it raised the curtain for a divine disturbance.

"This is actually my first time using this authority in London. Although I haven't used it for a while, I evidently haven't gone rusty."

"Eeeeeeeeeek!?"

Too preoccupied to pay attention to Voban's cold whispers, Sir Brennan screamed loudly.

Having lost his lifespan and flabby flesh, Sir Brennan cowered in fear.

It was probably due to the incessant lightning falling upon London Bridge. Every lightning strike was more powerful than Sir Brennan's ultimate lightning just now.

The marble used to build the bridge was smashed and pierced by the impacts, shaking violently.

A sturdy and massive bridge of stone. In spite of that, it was getting trampled

by the relentlessly descending lightning, swaying like a rope bridge in hurricane.

Had he the intention, Voban could even use rain to flood the River Thames.

A flash flood could easily break London Bridge and wash it away.

However, Voban had no such intent.

Just summoning some wind and rain as appropriate for two or three hours with some arbitrary lightning would be good enough—Voban spoke quietly to the thunder clouds in the sky above.

He had better hurry away from London Bridge. Unlike the rapidly departing godslayer, Sir Brennan was collapsed on the bridge.

Due to pouring the majority of his life force into the three-pronged vajra earlier, he did not even have enough remaining strength to walk. He was probably going to end up devoured by falling lightning or blown away by the raging wind.

Marquis Voban had no interest in terminating such trash personally.

Whether Sir Brennan was to live or die—

Let his luck decide. Perhaps his miniscule life might be spared if fortune were to favor him. Naturally, it was impossible to know what final fate awaited him.

Part 4

Dejanstahl Voban would gradually grow bigoted and obstinate as his appearance aged in time. However, back in the nineteenth century, he still kept relations with a few friends, sometimes putting aside his solemnity as a Devil King to display a playful mindset.

Sure enough, he was still quite young at the moment.

That being said, there were many things about the future Voban that had never changed from the start.

One of them being how his residences were built. With a penchant for changing his address on whim, he already had five temporary abodes within the city of London alone.

Among them, the mansion at his current location could be considered his most prestigious lair.

The address was Hampstead Heath. Located north of London's city center, the Hampstead area was a vast heathland.

Despite neighboring a large industrial city, this piece of land was filled with lush greenery and rural beauty.

Scattered across this vast and undeveloped wilderness were forests and lakes. Voban's temporary abode was constructed on a small hill overlooking the area.

It was a mansion that was not only gigantic but even excessively stately.

The exterior walls were painted a refreshing base color of white and looked quite striking even from afar. This mansion was apparently designed by a famous Scottish architect.

However, it was not actually Voban's property.

It belonged to a certain lineage of Counts. Two years ago, when Voban had

become acquainted with the current owner by chance and requested "prepare me a residence," the Count had reverently handed the mansion over to him.

And then, it was noon, several days after the duel with Sir Brennan.

As the master of the house, Voban was sitting on a chair in the library.

Originally an orphan who did not even know the alphabet, during past century and a half or so, he had already memorized many country's languages by ear. Right now, he had no problems at all whether reading or writing. However, Voban did not particularly love the books collected on the shelves.

Still, he did not dislike the unique atmosphere hanging in the library.

He would read some travelogues or mathematics books on occasion. Perhaps uninterested, he never touched novels recording other people's fictional delusions or literature related to magic.

However, the former was perhaps an interest on whim. Books in the latter category were completely worthless in Voban's view.

"I remember Gerard mentioning that it is an artifact related to some oriental war god."

The divine artifact from that night—the three-pronged vajra—was kept on a table in the library.

In addition, next to the wall were three magi on standby, known as "the king's advisers."

"Who can explain for me?"

'...Vajrabhairava. A guardian god of the Buddhist faith. Slaughterer of asuras and a war god of steel at the same time. Features a buffalo's head, three eyes, nine faces and thirty-four arms. His name means the terrifying god of vajra. Written in kanji, his name is given as Daiitokumyouou...'

"I see."

Hearing one of the three magi answer, Voban muttered.

"So that man was completely unworthy of the artifact huh?"

Sir Brennan was quite competent in his own right.

Nevertheless, he could not compare to Voban's three advisers at all. They were renowned far and wide as elite magi back when they were still alive.

All three had pallid faces and dilated pupils. Their expressions were also hollow and listless.

Literally faces of the dead. Furthermore, there was no uniformity in their attire.

One was dressed as a gentleman like Voban. Another was wearing a gray robe, slightly soiled. The last mage had tattered monastic clothing.

The power to bind the souls of the dead, ghosts, in servitude after killing the victims personally.

This was an ability stemming from the [Death Ring] authority. Apart from these three, he also kept several other dead magi as a think tank.

Hence, Voban had absolutely no need for knowledge about magic or books on the subject. All he had to do was ask directly.

Furthermore, he also allowed the three magi to make use of "their skills from life" to conduct research.

The former Count and fairy doctor, who had died young, was ordered to research methods to open portals to the Astral Plane freely. The aim was to visit gods and divine beasts living in seclusion in that realm.

The former authority on astrology and divination with outstanding spirit vision powers was commanded to report on unusual omens regarding Europe's fate, monitoring the movements of celestial bodies continuously.

Finally, the former abbot well-versed in Gnostic occult knowledge was carrying out secret rites of the highest difficulty, "the summoning of a Heretic God."

Even among the dead servants, these three magi stood out as special talents.

Thus, while Voban had them gathered in the library...

"I've brought lunch over, master~"

There was a knock at the door.

An adorable voice called out from behind the door. However, Voban ignored it.

He had clearly informed the servants in advance "to enter freely if doors were not locked." Rather than waste time on such meaningless exchanges, this would be far more reasonable.

Just as the door was opened casually as always, the maid entered.

Pushing a catering trolley, she brought a tea set and a plate of sandwiches.

Voban had no interest in going out of his way to the unnecessarily huge dining hall for daily meals. Instead, he had the servants deliver appropriate food to wherever he was at the time, to eat swiftly with expediency. This was more than enough.

Had he the wish, Voban could eat whatever he wanted.

However, he had no desire to become a gourmet at all. He even thought it was an utterly pointless hobby.

"Oh dear?"

The young maid widened her eyes. Her gaze was directed towards the three dead magi standing there.

Not allowed to lose composure no matter what was seen inside the mansion. Not allowed to ask. Not allowed to spread gossip outside. Fulfill your own duties. Voban had already ordered his butler to pass these rules clearly to all servants.

Furthermore, he had also mandated that only people who could carry out orders impeccably would be hired.

So long as they were able to do it, they would be hired regardless of origin. However, those who failed to adhere to the rules would be fired on the spot. Those who knew too much would be "disposed of"...

"Oh my oh my, well well."

The olive-skinned maid was murmuring unintelligibly.

She was displaying intense curiosity and kept staring at the three magi next to the wall.

Then while looking around, she placed the plate of sandwiches onto the table in the library and poured black tea from the pot to a cup.



What truly nimble motions—As if.

The tea spilled from the teacup and the tray, overflowing to the table it was resting on.

This was only natural, because the olive-skinned maid was tilting the pot with her hand trembling the whole time.

Voban frowned and swiftly picked up the three-pronged vajra.

Although the spilled black tea would not damage it, he felt displeased to see it get wet from the ostensibly Indian maid's carelessness.

Meanwhile, the maid finally noticed her blunder. Frantically, she placed the pot back on the table.

"I-I am terribly sorry. It was an accident!"

"....."

"I do make these kinds of blunders from time to time. But please rest assured, master~ Despite how I may look, I am actually quite experienced in a maid's work!"

"....."

"Actually, before I was hired here, I happened to become acquainted with this house's butler by chance. It was while chatting that you came up in conversation, master."

"....."

"He said his master was not easy to serve and that it was troubling that hired servants were rapidly fired. A severe shortage in manpower right now~ What a conundrum."

"....."

"So I said to him. 'In that case, please hire humble little Aisha here! After all, I can start working straight away!'"

Puffing her chest out proudly, the young maid recounted cheerfully.

In contrast to her claims of experience, she was rather young. Probably sixteen

or seventeen in age.

As a side note, while she was prattling on her own, Voban kept scowling in displeasure. However, the girl seemed completely unfazed.

Was she more courageous than most? A calm personality? Or particularly dense? Perhaps all three.

"Oh, excuse me, I forgot to mention first. My name is Aisha. It is a pleasure to meet you, master~"

"....."

You're fired too. Get out now.

Voban originally wanted to say it directly, but forcibly swallowed these words.

A Devil King feared by the people, even capable of slaying gods. That was Dejanstahl Voban.

For a man of such stature to personally declare the termination of employment, in light of a mere servant's blunder—That would be a bit ludicrous, all things considered. This was a job for butlers and servants.

Furthermore, ultimately...

Why was this girl so talkative? During the hiring process, the butler was supposed to explain how terrifying the employer was while concealing the master's identity.

In addition, the butler was meant to have explained things to pay attention to, such as employees were not allowed to speak to the master unless spoken to, nor make eye contact.

More importantly, the heavy atmosphere shrouding the entire mansion should have made servants extremely timid.

However, the girl spoke casually:

"What's the matter, master?"

"Nothing..."

It was quite rare but he did not know what to say.

Although that Viscount Gerard did not show fear either, he still felt extremely afraid of Voban in the depths of his heart. Voban could tell from his eyes. A wolf's sense of smell could not possibly fail to sniff out the scent of fear.

Most likely, this girl had mental problems.

Voban silently shook his head.

Fine, forget it. He would give orders to the butler later to terminate this girl's employment.

It would be utterly absurd to keep this oblivious maid, who congenitally lacked the ability to read moods, at his side. Just as Voban was thinking that with a shrug...

"By the way, the three gentlemen over there... What kind of divine power was used to resurrect them?"

"!"

Caught unprepared by the girl's question, Voban could not help but feel dumbstruck.

However, he did simply muttered "hoh" without expressing surprise.

"You can tell that it was accomplished through divine power?"

The last time he conversed with someone like a maid was probably decades ago.

Unaware that this almost approached a miracle, the olive-skinned maid smiled cheerfully and spoke as though she really had a screw loose.

"That goes without saying. Whether magic used by humans or miracles caused by divine power, isn't it totally obvious with a single look?"

"Although I personally agree, there are also many people who would be hard pressed to achieve this sort of 'goes without saying.'"

Gods and godslayers were mortal enemies since antiquity.

However, it was extremely difficult to discern a godslayer's hidden authorities and abnormality when in a normal state outside of battle. It was impossible for any mage, no matter how accomplished.

Conversely, a Heretic God's abnormality was practically visible at a glance.

Precisely because of that, there were occasionally people like Sir Brennan who would regard the likes of Voban's as the "Lord of Magi." Not knowing that the Devil King before their eyes possessed power to oppose gods, they overestimated themselves and issued challenges.

Meanwhile, the young maid smiled cheerfully and said:

"Is that how it goes? So these three really were summoned by you, master?"

Confronted with her smiling face, completely lacking in tension, Voban began to think.

If he were to invoke his authorities above a certain level of power, even the majority of magi would be able to understand how terrifying he was. Sir Brennan a few days ago was a good example. But unbelievably, this maid could tell that Voban was a godslayer from a single glance at the deceased standing in this library— What impressive vision. Voban secretly whispered to himself.

"Although a careless girl with brain problems no matter how you look at her, she is no ordinary person... huh?"

"E-Excuse me, master, you just said something very rude. Please speak more like a gentleman, master."

"Quiet. I am currently reconsidering our employment relationship."

"Huh..."

Although she did not look like it at all, this girl apparently had a disposition towards magic.

Did she come to this mansion with ulterior motives? Someone wishing to challenge him to a duel like that Sir Brennan? Or trying to uncover Marquis Voban's secrets?

I will ask the butler to report on this girl's origins later. Voban nodded.

To avoid trouble, he ought to throw her out immediately. If anything, a godslayer's instincts would have alerted him of danger.

Somehow, he felt that this girl was bad news.

Sooner or later, she would become the trigger for turmoil—He had a vague feeling of this sort.

However, Voban very simply dismissed these signals of danger.

As soon as danger appeared, he was going to snuff out the cause immediately.

There was nothing more matter-of-fact. This was not a choice that the most vicious Devil King, Voban the rare eccentric, must make no matter what. However, games were not fun without danger.

Since the trigger for turmoil was by his side, playing with her in return would serve as a form of amusement, right?

...In future days, Dejanstahl Voban would involuntarily click his tongue whenever he reminisced this event, deeply regretting his impulse back then.

If only he had thrown that girl out straight away—

However, lofty Devil King he may be, he still could not predict such a future at this time.

Part 5

Luo Cuilian was extremely removed from the mundane world.

She neither lived in mundane villages and towns nor interacted with other people.

Furthermore, despite being a mortal, she was also a godslayer who had reached the pinnacle of martial and Daoist arts—Her power could be described as mountain-moving and earthshaking.

Rather than human, it would be more apt to describe her as something like a sword deity or a celestial maiden.

That being said.

She was not born that way.

Her withdrawal from mundane society happened after she became the "Ruler of the Martial Realm."

Back when she was the leader of the Flying Phoenix School, she had built a training hall on the renowned mountain of Huangshan as the headquarters for the organization. However, she devoted herself to single-minded training and left the job of instructing disciples to others despite her position as leader...

She would occasionally descend the mountain to travel around as a chivalrous adventurer.

Moreover, Luo Cuilian was born in family of martial artists who worked in the business of providing security escorts for travelers and merchants. The prestigious Luo family was renowned in martial arts circles.

Born in such a family, Luo Cuilian grew up under the care of her parents and elder brothers.

(As a side note, it was said that the Luo family started out as traders.)

In the past, Luo Cuilian had frequent opportunities to interact with people. She was not someone purely removed from the mundane world.

If one were to ask Luo Cuilian's one and only direct disciple, he would probably say the following:

'Although Master could manage to fit in with society if she really wanted to, she's a willful woman who hates being surrounded by what she dislikes, which is why she lives secluded in the comfortable depths of a mountain forest.'

Also, he would add the following:

'However, she does have the self-awareness to know that she would blow everything away, whether people or towns regardless, simply because they offend her sight. Perhaps out of consideration for others, Master chooses to restrain herself by living out in the mountains. Nevertheless, with Master being who she is, even if she were being considerate, it would merely be just a tiny bit, seriously.'

This sort of self-awareness and disdain for civilized society of hers actually developed gradually through an incubation period.

During the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the earlier half of the twentieth century, her renown was widely circulated among those in Europe involved in the world of magic.

Namely as the "Mystic of the Orient, Cult Master Luo Hao" or the "Kungfu Cult Master."

That was when Luo Cuilian would visit the human world every seven or eight years, putting her mighty arm strength to use somewhere in the world should there be important objectives to achieve.

In addition, she had actually sojourned briefly in London too.

"The poverty of the masses is an unchanging sight no matter what country."

Luo Cuilian remarked quietly.

She was currently alone, walking along a small alley in a great metropolis tainted by smoke emission and immorality.

This was on the edge of the county known as the City of London.

A place completely removed from metropolitan civilization. The filthy streets were like a maze. Various rubbish and the vomit of drunkards were all over the place. Flies buzzed and gathered around rotting vegetables and decaying fruit.

Of course, the sour stench was exceptionally revolting.

It stemmed from sources including the foul odor of kitchen waste and alcohol or the sweat and body odors of pedestrians.

The sun had set roughly two hours prior, bringing night. The fuzzy light of gas lamps were unable to reach the alleys nearby.

Instead, bright lamps shone out from inside disreputable establishments. Pubs, gambling houses, brothels, opium dens, etc—These businesses only came alive after dark.

Naturally, the pedestrians were nothing respectable either.

Vulgar men who would drown their bodies' fatigue in alcohol after a day's hard manual labor.

Upper-class gentlemen visiting houses of ill repute in search of pleasure. Women dressed up flamboyantly. Merchants making under-the-table deals. Young girls selling flowers and matches for meager change. Vagrants relying on the charity of crude and filthy food from soup kitchens...

Every now and then, she would see opium addicts with glazed eyes.

Walking in a daze with aimless footsteps, they bore hollow and listless expressions.

Not only the people of the Qing Empire but also many Englishmen were hopelessly dependent on this addictive drug, putting their minds in a stupor, wrecking their own bodies and souls by their own hand.

"....."

She felt neither disdain nor sorrow.

Luo Cuilian simply viewed these addicts indifferently.

In fact, she had infiltrated several opium dens to catch a glimpse of the pitiful

conditions within.

There were a number of customers casually reclining on rows of beds, smoking feebly from opium pipes. Many of them were down to skin and bones.

She could also see people exhibiting blue spots on their skin from opium poisoning.

There were people grumbling at nonexistent targets. Even people who trembled in solitude, staring at phantoms that no one else could see...

Moreover, there was opium smoke hanging throughout the air. This alone was enough to put an ordinary person's body at risk.

Naturally, having trained her internal circulation and breathing control to the realm of perfection, Luo Cuilian was completely unfazed. Quietly, she left the opium den— "If the result of a country's wealth and prosperity is the endless creation of such depraved people... Then what meaning is there in civilization's progress?"

Luo Cuilian whispered in lamentation as a celestial maiden who lived as one with nature.

As a side note, she was currently in an alley in London Bridge's vicinity.

This was the east bank of the River Thames. The opposite, western bank was the center of metropolitan London and where the junction of Charing Cross was located.

This was indeed the heart of the British Empire.

The Admiralty, the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben and Buckingham Palace were all in the area.

Luo Cuilian was a Daoist priestess with full control over Daoist arts. Using her clairvoyance, she could easily capture all ironic absurdities of the British Empire within her view.

Coldly observing the depravity of civilization, she continued to walk.

Tonight, she had changed out of her usual Han clothing to wear a long blue robe.

It was an upper garment resembling a one-piece dress with the hem reaching down to her ankles. With slits reaching up to the sides of her waist, it facilitated movement greatly.

Normally speaking, onlookers would inevitably cast strange gazes at this "peculiarly dressed Chinawoman."

That would be unacceptable. Hence, she had used a Daoist spell of stealth.

This technique's effect was akin to camouflage, allowing one's appearance to meld into the surrounding scenery. By using this Daoist spell, the peerless Luo Cuilian would remain undiscovered even by people right next to her.

"I should hurry and fulfill the King of the Iron Wheel's wish."

Such a decadent city did not suit the Ruler of the Martial Realm.

I should return to the Qing Empire as soon as possible, Luo Cuilian decided. The dialogue with the leader of the Western Region's martial realm on the Tibetan plateau had taken place half a month earlier.

After that, she had used Daoist arts to fly instantly to Britain.

The divine artifact stolen by the British was a three-pronged vajra related to Vajrabhairava. Her objective was to retrieve this artifact.

The three-pronged vajra's wielder obtained the ability to use lightning—a prized authority common to sword gods of steel.

Even powerful martial artists or monks wielding Buddhist magic were unable to oppose a holder of that divine artifact. Consequently, the King of the Iron Wheel had asked a godslayer, Luo Cuilian, for a favor.

That being said, this London was a foreign land.

Unfamiliar with the environment, the Kungfu Cult Master left the task of searching to "subordinates" and was waiting for them to report back. During these few days, she had gone strolling alone in the city, observing the lives of the populace...

"Hmm."

Walking at night, Luo Cuilian came across a displeasing scene. She frowned.

Dressed in a gray coat, an olive-skinned girl, ostensibly Indian—wandering these kinds of streets yet inexplicably, did not look out of place—was currently being harassed by four drunkards.

Those were probably laborers who worked at shipyards on the River Thames.

Englishmen. However, their faces and physiques were different from that of the upper class.

Not especially tall but quite muscular in contrast, they were of rugged build. Despite living in the same city and belonging to the same ethnicity, the upper, middle and working class differed in appearance.

"U-Umm, excuse me. I'm only here because I got just a bit lost. May I pass?"

The girl spoke bravely to the drunkards accosting her.

However, the four drunkards ignored her. They wanted to force the girl into a nearby pub. They were probably driven by lust because she was quite a lovely girl.

The drunkards had blocked off the girl on all four directions.

"It'll be dawn if I don't hurry back to the mansion where I work..."

The girl's pitiful pleas fell on deaf ears.

Moreover, there were many races living in London. Indians, Chinese, Malays and African blacks could frequently be seen. This girl probably belonged to one of these races.

Although she could simply ignore the scene, chance encounters could be considered a type of destiny. Luo Cuilian shrugged.

Furthermore, she had frequently taught her cult subordinates to "engage in chivalry, sacrifice themselves for great justice to become heroes and saviors."

An occasional display of chivalry would not be a bad idea. Luo Cuilian exhaled.

This breath immediately turned into magical wind carrying a shockwave, striking one of the four drunkards on the back of his head.

The pitiful victim fell unconscious and collapsed on the ground just like that.

" " "!" " " "

With shocked faces, the remaining three drunkards looked around in alarm.

However, they could not discover Luo Cuilian's presence. This was only natural. How could such lowly scum possibly possess the eyesight to see through a Daoist spell of concealment?

Luo Cuilian then exhaled thrice. Things would be over with this.

The shockwaves struck the three drunkards on the backs of their heads in succession, rendering them unconscious. The harassed olive-skinned girl stared wide-eyed in surprise.

Smiling tenderly, the Kungfu Cult Master was just about to leave when...

"Umm, excuse me!"

However, someone called to her.

Luo Cuilian felt surprised for the first time since arriving in England. The Indian-looking girl with the underdeveloped sense of danger awareness was looking straight at her without getting mystified by the concealment spell. Evidently, the girl was cognizant of Luo Cuilian's presence.

Furthermore, she even smiled while she spoke:

"Please allow me to express my utmost thanks. How about we find a place to chat and have some tea?"

"What happened at the mansion?"

Viscount Gerard asked as soon as he met Marquis Voban.

"I can't believe that beautiful greenhouse was burnt down completely. It's not like a kitchen where fires could start accidentally."

"I agree completely. Normally speaking, it is not a place where a fire could originate."

Suppressing his displeasure, Voban nodded indifferently.

It was after greeting his friend in the library of the luxurious mansion in Hampstead Heath.

...The especially large main wing of the house was located in the center of the

mansion. To its east was the library block while the greenhouse lay to the west. An interconnected design.

Yesterday, the greenhouse on the west had suddenly caught fire.

Many of the wealthy who built vast residences in the countryside would cultivate a hobby of growing plants.

There were even people who preferred to plow and plant the land themselves instead of leaving it to a gardener. Greenhouses existed for this purpose.

"This is your—Dejanstahl Voban's—residence. It's hard to imagine anyone committing arson here. I could never do something so terrifying no matter what."

"....."

"Or perhaps, Dejan, did you set fire to the place on a moment's impulse as the master of the house?"

"Imagine whatever you like, but no answer shall come from these lips of mine."

Viscount Gerard's expression relaxed in response to his cold answer.

He apparently jumped to the conclusion that his speculation was right. Since there was no need to correct him, Voban avoided further discussion of the topic.

Moreover, he already knew the perpetrator's identity, namely, the new Indian maid.

Yesterday, when the girl named Aisha was maintaining the greenhouse, it had suddenly caught fire for some reason.

'I am terribly sorry. I made a slight mistake!'

That was how she reported it when she came to Voban to apologize.

What kind of mistake could start a blaze in a place where there were no sources of fire to begin with? Since it was too ridiculous, Voban did not even have the mood to pursue the matter, simply frowning with severe displeasure.

Half a month had gone by since meeting Aisha.

Earlier when he had inquired of the girl's origins, the butler had replied that nothing was known apart from what she said about "working as a maid all

along." It was a mystery whether she was an educated mage or not.

However, her claim that she could start working immediately was apparently not entirely wrong.

Despite her slight clumsiness, she learned things quickly and was quite enthusiastic in her work, that was what the butler reported. Nevertheless, every four days, "something" would happen.

Erroneously putting a spoonful of jam into a stewed dish when helping out in the kitchen. Slipping and falling when carrying a bucket of water. While falling, aforementioned bucket of water flying off into the distance, drenching a visiting guest completely.

Breaking a pot worth two hundred British pounds when chasing a mouse. As a side note, that figure was more than ten times a maid's average annual income.

In addition, there was burning down the greenhouse yesterday...

However, even with the way she was, after committing such acts, Aisha would always come over to Voban with a depressed look.

"I-I am so terribly sorry..."

Apologizing so meekly, she clearly expected the worst outcome.

Namely, unemployment. Will the "master" dismiss her from her post? Wondering in trepidation, she looked up at Voban's livid face.

Her frightened demeanor was virtually like that of a small animal in front of a hunger wolf.

"Umm... From now on, w-what should I do...?"

It was definitely not out of pity that Voban refrained from firing Aisha.

If anything, it was curiosity and defiant obstinacy.

Voban had kept her in his service knowing clearly she could cause trouble.

His preferences could probably be considered the reason why he would consider the notion that she might be quite amusing. He would not get maximum fun out of things unless he put in a bit of effort. Something on the level of a damaged house did not constitute sufficient reason to terminate her

employment. No, that must not be done.

Moreover, an incompetent servant was supposed to be fired immediately.

Of course, there were reasons why he had not done something so natural and logical.

'Insignificant human beings could not oppose the gods.'

He had successfully slain a god in the first place precisely because he resisted such common sense with all his might.

Without such an obstinate and oppositional mindset, there would be no Marquis Voban today. Hence, he simply sneered "hmph" and forgave Aisha rather simply.

That being said, even though the master of house was fine with it, the same did not go for the butler.

Plagued by stomach cramps because of the clumsy maid's incessant blunders, his worried demeanor deepened day by day.

Fortunately, it was Aisha's day off today. Since she had already gone out to town to enjoy herself, the butler was freed from worrying— "So, what business with me brings you here today, Gerard?"

"Because there is information I would like to tell you. I also heard a certain rumor."

"Hoh."

Putting the various house-related matters out of his mind, Voban was currently staring as a Devil King at his guest.

"How rare. To think you would pay a visit to my residence for a matter of this sort."

"Because quite a rare visitor has arrived in London."

"Now that is an intriguing manner of description."

"Dejan, you should know, right? We are not the only ones involved in the magic path, hidden in this city. There are also the suspicious beast tamers from the Malay Peninsula, the black magi from the Indian subcontinent, as well as

Chinese masters adept in Daoist arts..."

"All superficial differences, ultimately. There is hardly any variance in the fundamentals."

"Ah, that is truly something you would say. However, what would you think if I were to say that the most powerful Dao Master from the Chinese mainland has arrived? There are many rumors about *him*. Some say he is the ultimate martial artist and has even slain gods to usurp their authorities—"

"From China?"

Voban muttered. Actually, he already had an idea.

Seven years prior, while wandering Asia from the west to the southeast, he had heard this person's name many times.

Of those involved in magic and wizardry over there, even if they failed to recognize the name of Dejanstahl Voban, there was no one who did not know of this person's renown.

"I have heard things myself. There is a tyrant similar to me in the south of a certain country."

Voban recalled the name he had heard many times during his travels.

"I recall a name called something like Luo Hao."

"I'm glad you know it already."

This was apparently the name alright. Viscount Gerard instantly nodded.

"Actually, Master Luo Hao only made the long journey to England at the request of a Tibetan ally. His goal is to retrieve the stolen divine treasure, the three-pronged vajra."

"Another familiar name."

"The Chinese in London have received his orders and are desperately trying to locate the mystical treasure's whereabouts. Then they managed to find it. Namely, the fact that after a convoluted series of events, it has fallen into the hands of Marquis Voban, the Devil King of eastern Europe."

Viscount Gerard laughed in delight with an expression of an excited spectator.

"Master Luo Hao contacted me... Namely, one of the Marquis' few friends and simultaneously an Englishman, asking me to pass this message to you. Please choose a venue for negotiations within the next few days."

Part 6

"Actually, I started living in London a few months ago."

"I see."

The two of them had found random seats at a nearby dingy pub.

The strange maid introduced herself as Aisha then suddenly started to talk about herself.

The audience was Luo Cuilian. She had never conversed with another woman on this type of subject. In fact, across her long life, she had never had a female friend.

"After traveling overseas for a while, I discovered that it was more costly than I imagined... It made me feel a bit poor. Right now, I'm working while saving up."

"I see."

"Today happens to be my day off, so I went for a stroll in the streets, something I haven't done for quite a while, but ended up getting lost accidentally. You really helped me out just now. I'm so grateful. Now I can get back to the mansion in peace."

"I see."

"Fufufufu. Traveling is wonderful. When touring the world, visiting countries never seen before, my mood naturally turns to joy. It makes me feel so very happy."

"I see."

"By the way, may I ask what is your name?"

"I have no reason to tell you."

Luo Cuilian found this type of inane chatter to be completely worthless.

Although she had halfheartedly obliged Aisha's request so far, this was her first time to give a serious answer.

She was not simply someone named Luo Cuilian. At the same time, she was the most exalted warrior and supreme "king."

A self-introduction could not possibly come so lightly. Hence, she gave a most matter-of-fact answer but Aisha was very surprised.

"W-Why!? Isn't it a kind of destiny that we met like this!?"

"Is that so?"

"It is! So please tell me your name, dear elder sister. Come."

"There is no reason for me to be called your sister."

"Ooooooooooh, so mean."

"An oath of sworn siblings is extremely sacred and solemn. That is simply the way things are."

"Th-Then how should I address you?"

"Well... How about the following? 'O sacred and sagacious noblewoman, lofty as the stars, hardy as gemstones. O supreme monarch whom none of the gods could reach. I am compelled to pledge unreserved loyalty and reverence to you.'"

"Th-That's far too long! I knew it, 'dear elder sister' is best."

Ignoring the girl's nonsense, Luo Cuilian glanced at the pub's counter. The server was not English but Chinese.

This was one of the gathering places for Chinese immigrants living in London.

The owner and servers were all Chinese. To put things further in perspective, this was a venue for chivalrous outlaws, thieves and other people involved in underground businesses would exchange information.

Luo Cuilian initially ignored Aisha, intending to leave quickly. However, Aisha kept hassling her like a child following a mother. Left without a choice, Luo Cuilian brought her here. Naturally, had she the intent, she could have lost Aisha any time.

Luo Cuilian was a master of *qinggong*, the art of lightness. Were she to sprint

seriously, no one could catch her.

However, it would be a taint to her pride if the Ruler of the Martial realm had to resort to martial arts against such a commoner. She absolutely refused to do something so unseemly.

She originally thought that Daoist arts would be sufficient, but for some reason, the concealment spell did not work on Aisha.

In the end, Luo Cuilian still could not fathom who on earth this girl could be, hence time rolled forward to the present.

"Th-The tea is served."

At this moment, the server arrived next to their table.

He placed a set of tea ware with Chinese tea gently before Luo Cuilian. His hand also kept trembling. The terrifying rumors of Cult Master Luo Hao had filled him with overwhelming fright.

Apart from those who had had dealings with her in the past, no one knew her name of Cuilian.

Family name Luo. Given name Cuilian. Style name Hao. She was known more widely as Luo Hao, the leader of the Holy Cult and Ruler of the Martial Realm.

Luo Cuilian spoke sharply to the quivering server.

"How is the task proceeding?"

"...S-So far, no p-p-progress yet..."

Hearing the server's stammering response, she nodded silently.

On this occasion, she had issued orders to all Chinese in London with Daoist and martial arts ties.

Pledge your allegiance to me, the Ruler of the Martial Realm. My mission is to retrieve the divine treasure, the three-pronged vajra—That was what she had commanded.

Hence, they searched desperately and finally found the divine treasure's whereabouts.

Reportedly, the divine treasure had fallen into the hands of a man named

Marquis Voban. Today, she had just issued an order—Arrange a meeting for me with that man.

"Oh, excuse me. May I have another cup of tea?"

Even amidst this sort of tense atmosphere, Aisha still spoke calmly.

The server's gaze shifted left and right, at a loss what to do. He ought to know what kind of punishment he would be subjected to if he were to ask for Luo Cuilian's instructions on a matter of this sort.

In fact, if he dared to speak of anything irrelevant to the mission, she intended to pluck out his tongue on the spot.

Hence, Luo Cuilian felt quite satisfied with the server's excellent upbringing. As the Ruler of the Martial Realm, such fearful reverence from others was only proper.

...As a side note, a couple decades later, her opinion would develop even further.

The Ruler of the Martial Realm should not appear before the eyes of mortals.

However, at this point in time, she was still not too opposed to showing her face.

Rather, Luo Cuilian had commanded all subordinates across the entire world that carelessly discussing her appearance was a punishable crime.

In the end, the server simply withdrew silently from the side of the table.

"It is almost time to decide upon my lodgings for tonight..."

Luo Cuilian suddenly whispered. A place to stay but not a hotel.

Ultimately, this sort of city probably did not have anywhere suitable for her. However, if she were to venture out slightly, into the countryside, there was still a vast wilderness surrounding London.

To spend the night with grass as the mattress and hazy moonlight for company.

However, there was also the girl who could not comprehend such notions.

"Goodness... Dear elder sister, so I see you are troubling over where to stay. In

that case, please come to my room!"

"You mentioned you are working at a house somewhere, didn't you?"

Presumably, someone working in her type of occupation would live in that kind of house.

This was common sense for London in this era. As expected, Aisha answered "yes." However, she promised with a radiant smile: "However, it'll be fine if you sneak in. I have a double room, but no one else is living in it at the moment!"

"Wouldn't you be admonished if it came to light? Were this to happen at my residence—"

Luo Cuilian declared coldly.

"Should anyone dare to act in such a manner, I would immediately have them expelled from the house. Several fingers and toes shall be severed as a reminder of their sins."

"That's far too cruel, dear elder sister!"

"Correct yourself. I am not your sister."

"S-Sorry. Oh... But my master is a kind man, so I'm sure he'll permit you to stay a night, dear elder sister!"

"Hoh."

Luo Cuilian murmured with a frown.

This Indian girl looked extremely gentle and frail, but never showed any inclination in following Luo Cuilian's orders. Furthermore, "dear elder sister" had slipped out of her mouth again.

No matter which subordinate, no one had ever dared to subject Cult Master Luo Hao to such irreverence.

Furthermore, all the Chinese in this pub were frozen stiff in fear.

They all knew very well. They knew that Cult Master Luo Hao was someone who placed great importance on her authority and would never tolerate anyone with the audacity to offend her.

Even so, Aisha was just a girl encountered by chance. She did not know Luo

Cuilian's identity.

To treat her the same as subordinates of the Holy Cult would ultimately be too merciless.

Deciding to forgive her for now, Luo Cuilian continued the conversation.

"Is your master truly that lenient a person?"

"Yes. He always looks grumpy and gives off terrifying vibes, refusing to let anyone talk to him—That's the impression he gives off."

"Evidently a rather arrogant man."

"But he's actually a very kind person. Whenever I keep committing repeated blunders in my job as a maid, he silently forgives me as though saying 'no helping it★'."

"How half-baked. Tattoos ought to be applied to the face and body as evidence of crimes."

"He seems to have a tough life. I think that's why he can generously accept even someone like me... Also, sometimes..."

At this moment, Aisha lowered her voice.

"He would stare intently at me as though there were words on his mind."

"Could he be hiding emotions in his heart?"

"Yes. Master would look so agonized at times like those... Then I realized it yesterday. Master probably sees me as a *little sister*!"

While listening casually to her, Luo Cuilian caught the presence of a "visitor."

She cast her gaze sharply to the pub's entrance. However, Aisha clenched her fist and continued to insist without seeming to notice anything.

"If that's true, everything makes sense now. Master surely must have a deceased little sister. His sister probably looks just like me."

"Hoh."

"There can be no mistake about it. That's why master looks after me so much. He sees me as his sister's substitute!"

"I see now. By the way, you called yourself Aisha, is that right?"

"Yes yes. What's the matter, dear elder sister?"

"I am not your sister. Forget it, is that person over there an acquaintance of yours?"

Luo Cuilian stared diagonally behind Aisha and asked indifferently.

"Similar to what you described earlier, he seems to be staring at you with words on his mind."

"Really? Who could it be—m-master!?"

"I shall make myself clear first. I do not have any deceased younger sister or brother. Rather, it would be better to say that I have no memories of family at all."

With a livid expression as though suppressing wrath by sheer force of will, the young man spoke.

After entering the pub earlier, he had walked to this table directly then stood behind Aisha the whole time.

Why was this girl in this kind of place? He seemed to be asking and looked quite displeased.

"Your name is Aisha, right? Looks like you have one or two screws loose in your head."

The young man threw insults coldly.

"Dump all the delusions generated from that broken mind of yours into the trash then shut your mouth. Otherwise, I shall regard you as a rag and toss you away like defective goods."

"E-Ehhhhh!?"

"My maid has evidently given you offense. Please accept my apologies on her behalf."

After causing the Indian girl to go stiff with his harsh orders, the young man spoke to Luo Cuilian.

Twenty or thirty years of age. A respectably dressed gentleman.

Rather intellectual in demeanor. However, none of this could fool Luo Cuilian.

This young man was no "gentleman." A wolf. What she could glimpse vaguely behind him was the appearance of a ferocious demonic wolf.

Her outstanding spirit vision powers as a Daoist priestess had apparently allowed her to see his true nature.

Luo Cuilian smiled sternly then spoke to the one enveloped in a wolf's aura.

"No offense taken. I did not even listen to the majority of what this girl said. Neither have I any intention of taking them to heart, hence there is no need for apologies."

"Hmm. Now that is truly gratifying."

"Umm, could the two of you use slightly gentler language..."

"I recall asking you to shut your mouth."

"You will not be let off lightly should you interrupt our conversation again."

"Y-Yes!"

Ignoring the depressed girl Aisha, Luo Cuilian gazed at the young man before her.

This man might possess the power to oppose me—Such suspicions surged in her heart. In other words, was he one of *those* after all?

Luo Cuilian smiled and spoke decisively:

"Your name is apparently Dejanstahl Voban."

"Indeed. I came here only because I sent people to seek Cult Master Luo Hao's location... However, I never expected the holder of that name to be a woman."

Both of them discerned each other's identity at a glance and sneered at the same time.

Luo Cuilian and Marquis Voban both recognized that they were confronting a peer—A *godslayer* just like themselves.

When encountering gods, a godslayer would instinctively understand their identities.

However, instinct did not always work against their peers, the godslayers. Even so, the Eastern European and Chinese Devil Kings instantly realized each other's identity.

They both styled themselves as the strong and exhibited the magical power of Devil Kings and the appearance of warriors.

More than anything, these many factors were the best proof of the indisputable fact that "a godslayer was here."

Next, Voban gave Aisha a look.

"I see now. This maid was one of yours to begin with. I originally found her to be a girl with a bizarre personality, but now it finally makes sense. Many things can be explained now that it is known that she is the Kungfu Cult Master's subordinate."

"What are you talking about?"

Hearing unexpected words, Luo Cuilian instantly responded.

"An eccentric girl capable of resisting the Daoist arts of I, Luo Hao... I see now. So she is Marquis Voban's maidservant. Then I can understand now. There is none like her among the believers in my Holy Cult. None like her shall be admitted into the faith either."

"....."

"....."

Just as their mutual gazes were asking "Could it be that she is not one of yours?" Next to Luo Cuilian and Marquis Voban, the person in question spoke up timidly.

"Excuse me, my identity is what I explained when I was hired."

"...My error in judgment, huh?"

"...Looks like I committed a slight blunder."

The two of them decided to ignore the irrelevant person intruding on a meeting between Devil Kings.

They gazed at each other again. Naturally, it was not out of love and

admiration.

Instead, this was a mindset of defiance towards "peers," extremely rare in this world. Hostility stimulated their fighting spirit, making them deeply interested in the opponent before their eyes.

There is no telling what outcome may result if I were to fight him, thought Luo Cuilian.

Furthermore, she was filled with certainty. He was undoubtedly thinking the same thing.

"Well then, I came here for no other reason tonight. To resolve the matter of that divine artifact."

Marquis Voban slowly began to speak.

"Cult Master Luo Hao, would you care to listen to a suggestion of mine?"

"Please speak."

"I would like to invite you to my mansion for a detailed discussion regarding the matter. What are your thoughts? It would be rather hasty to resolve everything here."

"Fufufufu. In a normal situation, I would never agree to such an invitation."

Noticing that the wolf king had intentionally glossed over the main point, Luo Cuilian smiled gently.

Naturally, the intent was not a talk. This was an act akin to the western custom of "throwing down the gauntlet."

"I, Luo Hao, am not someone so ignorant of courtesy as to refuse a personal invitation from someone of your stature. When shall this take place, may I ask?"

"How about tomorrow? Of course, I don't mind visiting you instead either."

"Of course not. I shall be the one to pay my respects this time. Upon my honor as Ruler of the Martial Realm, I shall keep my promise."



If you are concerned about setting foot on my home ground, I don't mind visiting instead—

Of course not. Who could say such spineless words—

Hidden behind the superficially polite conversation were slightly goading messages.

Also, Luo Culian suddenly sensed it. A storm was about to arrive. Furthermore, it was a violent storm of epic proportions sufficient to uproot London outright.

Part 7

A night of strong wind.

Heavy clouds shrouded the night sky, obscuring the stars.

It was the next day after Dejanstahl Voban had met the Chinese mystic. That evening, she kept her promise and arrived at his mansion at Hampstead Heath.

When the two of them met in the great hall on the second floor, Cult Master Luo Hao said:

"I have come to pay my respects on account of your invitation. Thank you for your hospitality."

"Not at all. I should be the grateful one. It is surely my honor as the master of the house to receive one of such greatness as you."

The two of them engaged in superficial social pleasantries.

Also, "dead servants" had led the way for Luo Hao from the entrance hall.

All domestic staff had been given a special day off. A grand occasion to be enjoyed fully without disturbance from anyone. That was presumably the intent.

"A meal has been prepared, although it is nothing extravagant. If it pleases you, care to join me?"

In the center of the great hall was a long banquet table. It would be more than enough for twenty people to sit around it.

Dinner had been arranged on the table in advance. Quail pie, whole roasted chicken, spiced roasted lamb chops, cheese platter, sugared confectionery, various fruits, cucumber and cold cut sandwiches, *etc.*

Although all of the food had cooled down, the taste should still be quite fine.

"Of course, it is not poisoned. But should you have any suspicions, I don't mind serving as the food taster first."

"I believe something so foolish would be beyond you. Be that as it may... I shall pass on dinner."

Luo Hao was dressed in fluttering Han clothing today.

Compared to yesterday's long robe, it was a more exquisite outfit. As customary, Voban was still dressed impeccably as a gentleman. Since it was within the mansion after all, the frock coat was eschewed.

Both of them could be considered in formal attire. However, it was not for the sake of a dinner party.

"For us, there is a more important matter than a meal."

"Indeed. Let us make haste and begin."

Reaching consensus, the pair chuckled simultaneously.

How incredible. The two of them were completely different in personality and background. Never in the future would they become friends with mutual interests.

Rather, they were more cut out to be bitter rivals.

In spite of that.

The two Devil Kings were similar people indeed.

Starting from their first encounter until the duel, everything progressed as naturally as flowing water. From that first moment when their gazes met, "something like this happening" between them was already preordained.

Was it because both of them were *warriors* who fought Heretic Gods persistently that this sort of situation arose?

There was a separation of ten feet (roughly three meters) between them. This sort of distance could be closed in an instant.

Voban bowed slightly and took half a step forward.

In response, Luo Cuilian simply stood upright. However, she spread her palms. Perhaps the only weapons that could rival these palms were blades and spears wielded by war gods—?

Sensing this instinctively, Voban instantly shuddered.

At the same time, he experienced joy that made his body tremble. Anything less could not be called a fight!

"I suppose we ought to decide on a rule first. A simple one will do."

It was imperative not to be excessively reckless in front of a formidable foe.

Voban relaxed his shoulders and walked to the center of the great hall.

This was the long table where the cooled luxurious dinner was kept. There was also one object placed together with the dishes.

An oriental weapon with three-pronged ends. The three-pronged vajra.

"To the victor goes this thing, how about that?"

"No objections. Very well."

Voban pointed to the prize and asked. Luo Hao nodded indifferently.

Their interest had shifted to the duel from the divine artifact of the Tibetan plateau. The demonic wolf king of Europe versus the undefeated mystic of the east, whose power would come out on top?

Then in that very instant...

"Sorry for being late! I will be here to serve presently!"

The door opened loudly while a frantic Aisha stepped inside.

Dressed in an apron dress of black and white, a white headband on her head. A maid's official attire.

"I can't believe it's so late after I took a brief afternoon nap. My goodness? Why are you showing such scary expressions, master and dear elder sister? What happened?"

"This girl is here today too..."

"Looks like something went wrong..."

The farcical entry disrupted the rare sense of tension. Luo Hao shook her head as though sighing while Voban muttered in annoyance.

Regardless, he pulled himself together and asked Aisha:

"I believe I have asked all domestic staff, including you, to take the day off,

didn't I? Furthermore, I expressly demanded all of you to leave the premises during this time."

"Yes, I was already informed. However."

Lively as ever, the Indian maid smiled tenderly.

Like an innocent maiden searching for "happy things" every day, an optimistic smile completely devoid of darkness.

"I already took a day off yesterday, so I was thinking I cannot forget my manners on this commemorative day with my dear elder sister visiting. That's why I came back secretly!"

"I see. In that case—"

Voban snapped his fingers. It was a signal to the "dead servants."

The deceased who had led the way for Luo Hao earlier were stationed outside the door the whole time. These dead men had been palace attendants at Versailles before the French Revolution broke out and were still wearing their uniforms from back then. The dead servants grabbed Aisha by the shoulders and dragged her outside the great hall.

"Throw her out of the house."

"Ah! W-What are you doing!? I still have work to doooooooooooooooooo—"

The servants were very strong. The delicate maiden could not possibly resist.

Aisha's cries gradually grew distant. Having eliminated the interloper successfully, Voban turned to today's main guest again.

"My apologies for the wait. Well then, it is about time."

"Yes. Let us begin, King Voban."

The curtain finally rose for the duel between two Devil Kings.

Signs of spring still had yet to appear in London during late February.

During a night of extreme cold that could still be considered midwinter, raging winds were blowing strongly. The culprit who had summoned these raging winds was actually Dejanstahl Voban.

An authority of *storms*, controlling wind, rain and thunder—

A storm brought upon by wielding such a power. Wind and clouds would naturally gather in Voban's surroundings whenever he felt excited.

Usually, a thunderstorm would bring rain too. However, things were slightly different tonight.

Due to the low temperature, snowflakes fell instead. Powerful gusts of wind, combined with a vast amount of snowflakes, soon produced a blizzard.

This evening, the city of London was suddenly struck by a blizzard.

The somewhat filthy metropolis was instantly covered by a blanket of white snow. Powerful gusts of wind mixed with snowflakes turned London, extremely chilly in February to begin with, into a land of cold as though it was territory belonging to the Queen of Winter.

In the center of the blizzard, an intense battle was heating up on a countryside plain.

"Hahahaha. So there exists someone with similar powers as me."

"It would be too soon for you to conclude that. The Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl I usurped from a southern goddess... is nowhere near that simple a power."

Confronted with the sneering Voban, Luo Hao simply announced indifferently.

Surprisingly, the Easter European Devil King was not the only one capable of controlling gales.

Although the underlying principle was completely different, the mystic with full mastery over Daoist arts also caused magical wind to blow. To think her singing voice could turn into a gale with lyrics even accompanied by the release of shockwaves.

"A thousand li of yellowed clouds, the dim sun's whitish glow / The north wind blows a flurry of wild geese and wilder snow..."[\[9\]](#)

"Oh?"

"Fear not that on the road ahead, no soul-mate may be found / For under

heaven who is he that your name does not know!?"

"Hmph! To think you'd use such mysterious spell words!"

This "contest of wind" was the first round of the duel.

From Luo Hao's cherry lips came whistling that formed a vortex before her, instantly turning into a tornado.

Everything struck by the fiercely spinning storm was instantly demolished.

Currently, a shockwave capable of leveling impregnable castles was rotating nonstop in Luo Hao's surroundings, displaying ferocious mettle akin to the hand of an invisible god of destruction.

Naturally, Voban's great mansion was destroyed in a mere minute or two.

The beautiful outer walls of white, the roof, the beams, the pillars—All construction materials were pulverized to dust and blown into the night sky where a blizzard was raging.

"Hmm. I never expected your methods to be even more unruly than mine."

"Nonsense. This would be on the level of mere child's play to you too."

On this former site of the leveled mansion, the two Devil Kings were facing off.

Both were standing calmly in composure, treating the powerful storm of magic as a mere breeze, gazing at each in natural postures.

Putting aside Luo Hao who was at the center of the tornado, there was a reason why Voban was untroubled by magical wind.

"Well, I suppose this level definitely could not be considered intense yet."

Naturally, it was because he was also an adept user of storms.

Avoiding the tornado arising from Luo Hao's singing, he allowed the wind to pass by the left and right of his body. Furthermore, it was continuously while the magical wind's shockwaves persisted rather than momentarily— It was a divine feat only possible given the magical power and experience of a godslayer who had accumulated almost a century and a half of battle experience.

"Fufufufu. It is almost time for me to counterattack, I suppose?"

"Then I shall confront it. Bring it on."

The localized strength of the powerful blizzard attacking London—increased explosively.

Voban finally caused the blowing of a counterattacking storm. However.

"Hill to hill no bird takes its flight *And path to path no man traces recite. Cloaked, a fisherman in his boat alone* Fishing on the river with snowy white!"[\[10\]](#)

Luo Cuilian's recited lyrics further increased the wind's power.

The tornado surrounding her gained greater strength and momentum, swallowing the powerful wind released by Voban to create an even more ferocious vortex of storms.

"In that case—!"

"Haste!"

Voban summoned maximum lightning from the sky. Luo Cuilian chanted a concise spell word.

Just as the lightning was about to strike, China's Ruler of the Martial Realm vanished. Within an instant, she had unbelievably moved ten yards (roughly nine meters) backwards.

It was magic for moving extremely short distances instantaneously. Voban recognized this spell too.

However, to think she could make use of such an instant so skillfully. Voban had never seen someone use the technique to such an extent. He yelled: "Now that is a truly clever method of fleeing!"

He commanded the thunderclouds above to keep casting lightning to the ground.

Of course, Luo Hao continued to use that teleportation spell, evading all of the lightning. However, what came next was real show.

Voban increased the sharpness of his sensitivity as a master of wind—to sense the flow of the atmosphere.

Sensing disruptions in the airflow from the sudden intrusions caused by the

Kungfu Cult Master's movements, he instantly directed lightning at the corresponding location.

Of course, he did not think this sort of method could take out the enemy in one strike.

Until Luo Hao was cornered, he was not going to stop unleashing lightning!

"Haste!"

"Haste!"

"Haste!"

Luo Hao kept teleporting in Voban's surroundings.

Only by doing so did she manage to evade the falling lightning by the slimmest of margins. However, she probably realized that evasion could not last indefinitely at this rate.

She suddenly stepped directly towards Voban and charged!

"Looks like it doesn't work too well in a battle involving timing."

This was not a spell of instantaneous movement.

Instead, it was extremely aggressive footwork with incomparable speed. By the time he realized, Luo Hao was already right before his eyes. Furthermore, her right palm was attacking, powered the momentum of her movement!

Voban could evade this attack only because of his beast-like reflexes.

"!?"

Luo Hao was greatly surprised. It must have been quite unexpected for her opponent to dodge her palm strike.

One could hardly blame her. Apart from war gods of heaven, this was her first time to encounter an opponent of such powerful combat skills. While Voban clicked his tongue, she kept launching a relentless flurry of palm strikes.

Attacking five times with each hand within a breath, she executed a total of ten palm strikes.

Next, she aligned her fingers to thrust at the enemy like a sword's edge.

A slicing attack using the little finger's side of the palm like a karate chop. Slice. Slice.

However, Voban dodged all of these attacks. Rather than nimble movements, he was acting just like a cornered beast.

"Hmph. Now you are trapped!"

"I see. So that's your plan!"

Seeing Voban cursing while transforming into a "wolf," Luo Cuilian nodded.

The opponent merely had martial arts on the level of amateur hobbyists. This level was not supposed to be able to oppose the maiden who had fully mastered the essence of Chinese martial arts.

However, Voban possessed Apollo's authority.

It was a power allowing him to summon hundreds, thousands of vicious wolves and even transform himself into a wolf—

It raised his instincts as a magical wolf to the maximum, enough to surpass wild wolves. Transformed into a gray wolf, he was able to accomplish the challenging feat of engaging Luo Hao in frontal close quarters combat.

As a quadrupedal beast, he relied on swift reflexes and agile movements.

Then he kept dodging the skillful and powerful palm strikes. Dodge. Dodge. Dodge.

Furthermore, seizing an opening in the opponent's attacks, he pounced fiercely at her throat. In the instant just as he was about to bite down—
"Fufufufu. I knew you were going to make this move!"

Luo Hao caught the left and right sides of the gray wolf's face between her palms.

Rather than a pummeling blow, it was a gripping skill. With mighty strength capable of smashing mountains, Luo Hao's palms attempted to push into the wolverine Voban's skull!

"Tsk! Is this monstrous strength one of your authorities too!?"

Instantly discerning the opponent's intent, Voban simultaneously invoked one

of his prided authorities. A moment too late and his skull probably would have been crushed like a watermelon.

Escaping from the Cult Master's adamantine strength required the vicious magic wolf to turn gigantic.

Previously seven feet (roughly 210 centimeters) in length, the gray wolf's size expanded ten times as big in an instant.

The force of expansion shook Luo Hao off and blew her away.

Currently, Voban's enormous body was over sixty feet (roughly eighteen meters) in size, resplendent with overwhelming glory as befitted the deserved title of the "great giant wolf."

Witnessing this dramatic change, the Kungfu Cult Master exclaimed in admiration.

"To think you could transform into such an astonishing form... Truly befitting the incarnation of the demonic wolf."

"The same goes for you. I never suspected such mighty strength to be hidden within you."

While appreciating each other's power, the two of them did not stop moving, of course.

Using a giant wolf's jaws, Voban was trying to swallow the maidenly Luo Hao whole.

However, a gigantic fist was thrust upwards from the ground, rivaling the gigantic wolf king's head in size. An uppercut intended to smash the wolf king's lower jaw.

Voban jumped backwards swiftly and dodged the punch.

In the nick of time. A second too late and his lower jaw would have been shattered, perhaps even death on the spot.

Voban looked across, only to see a smoke-like substance rising from Luo Hao's shoulders—then turning into a gigantic man with bulging muscles. Known as a Buddha Guardian in the orient. With a naked upper torso, the brawny physique was visible at a glance.

Executing an uppercut, the giant's beautiful muscles were unbelievably shining with golden luster.

"How is that? My avatar, an Om pair of Benevolent Kings... This is one of them."

"Hmph. I used to lament for want of a worthy opponent, but never did I expect such a formidable foe to suddenly show up."

One side was the martial artist monarch of the orient with full mastery over Daoist and martial arts. The other side was the demonic wolf king of Europe completely uninitiated in magic and martial arts.

Despite the stark contrast between the two of them, they were equals as warriors.

Ruling over the orient and the occident respectively, the two Devil Kings' encounter had developed into a duel. This was precisely what Dejanstahl Voban had always sought.

Part 8

So...

Slightly earlier, a girl was driven out of the mansion by "dead servants."

Her name was Aisha. As already known, she was the maid in Marquis Voban's house. After getting thrown out, she circled outside the mansion, still refusing to give up.

She intended to sneak into the mansion again after things had cooled down.

"Master and my dear elder sister are so mean. I can't believe they're excluding me of all people."

While she silently wept and rubbed her hands that were stiff from the cold...

Raging winds erupted from within the mansion—

It was the instant when the "dear elder sister" had unleashed her authority of magical wind inside the mansion's great hall. At maximum power, it was forceful enough to blow everything away.

The shockwave-accompanied tornado howled, rampaging madly on a plain in the London countryside.

The stylish country house lost its shape in a matter of a minute or two. Several minutes later, the majority of the construction materials had been blown away completely without trace.

Furthermore, the "master" was adding further to the strength of this magical wind.

An authority of storms—later named [Sturm und Drang], a power to summon raging winds and heavy rain.

"Huhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh~!?"

A sudden gust of magical and violent wind. Of course, Aisha was caught in its

wake.

After all, this wind was powerful enough to blow away a magnificent mansion. Logically speaking, a girl's body would be swept helplessly into the winter night sky.

However, she swiftly cradled her head in her arms and sprawled on the ground. This was the best posture for reducing wind resistance.

"Ooooooh. Master and my dear elder sister have forgotten that I'm still around."

This terrifying storm must have been caused by one of the two.

Aisha was instantly certain. Since she had not sensed the presence of Heretic Gods nearby, surely this was a godslayer's doing.

After all, it was absolutely impossible for anyone else to do something of this sort.

"Looks like I've no choice but to make a move..."

Making a decision, Aisha chanted spell words fueled by forceful thoughts and feelings.

"O beautiful maiden, I beseech you to open the terrifying doors of esoterism —"

Immediately, snowflakes were mixed into the madly blowing storm.

Indeed. This was the reversal of the authority she had usurped from the goddess Persephone.

Reversing the ability to bring about healing and the spring season, it was turned into the power to summon death and the chill of winter.

The girl Aisha was currently the Queen of Winter.

Furthermore, the cold air brought by her authority had turned the rampaging storm into a blizzard.

In that case, there was no need to worry, because no blizzard could defeat the Queen of Winter regardless of its strength. Aisha stood up swiftly.

"What on earth is up with them...? Oh well."

Thanks to the entire mansion getting leveled, she instantly spotted the two of them.

Originally on the second-floor great hall, Marquis Voban and the Chinese noblewoman (master had called her "Cult Master Luo Hao" so that was probably her name). At some point in time, the two of them had descended to the ground, controlling their respective authorities over wind.

What surprised Aisha was that those two had unbelievably started a big fight.

"Both of yooooooooooooooooou, please don't fight anyooooooooooooore!"

Cult Master Luo Hao and Marquis Voban were currently locked in an intense "contest of wind."

Due to the wind's thunderous rumbling, Aisha could not reach them no matter how hard she yelled.

However, the entire metropolis of London was going to be destroyed if their fight continued. Aisha herself knew better than anyone how powerful godslayers' authorities were.

"In that case, I'll have to stop them."

She told herself to try her best. Although this fact seemed to have escaped master and her dear elder sister completely, actually...

Aisha was also a godslayer.

Roughly nine months prior, she had slain the goddess Persephone during her travels in Greece.

That was precisely the beginning of her adventure. After that, she had gotten caught up in a commotion along the Silk Road of the Sea, even ending up in a predicament where she was taken to Hong Kong where she also encountered a Heretic God by chance.

A benevolent guardian god of the populace, bearing a Buddhist saint's countenance.

It was an adventure where she had been left with no choice but to slay him. What a sorrowful memory, it felt only like yesterday for Aisha.

Prior to going on this journey, Aisha was actually quite wealthy.

It was the fortune left behind by her previous master. However, due to donating the majority of her money to aid refugees she met during her travels, she had returned to London utterly impoverished.

"Truly so many sad things happened back then."

While holding back her tears that were spilling out, she suddenly realized.

She must invoke *that authority* too in order to stop the two rampaging Devil Kings.

"When time is not yet ripe for good to result, even the benevolent shall encounter misfortune; when time is ripe for good to result, fortune shall come to pass, let good be rewarded with fortune and evil shall reap what they sow..."

It was an authority of luck, usurped from a guardian god of the populace.

As long as Aisha vowed to do good and was in the process of accomplishing them, it was a power that would confer upon her all sorts of good luck, large and small.

Naturally, her vow this time was the following:

"I must help master and my dear elder sister reconcile. Please grant humble little Aisha the aid of good fortune... Oh my?"

The instant she chanted, something fell from the flurry of snow blowing in the air.

Plop. A steel rod fell on the snow. Its two ends were each split into three prongs. Roughly a foot (thirty centimeters or so) in length.

"This seems to be master's. I should return it to him later."

The storm had probably swept it into the sky above from the mansion.

Aisha picked up the three-pronged steel rod and placed it into her apron's pocket.

Then at this moment—The two Devil Kings' duel was entering a climax.

Unbelievably, Marquis Voban had transformed into a gigantic gray wolf. But Cult Master Luo Hao was not to be outdone. Leading a half-naked Buddha

Guardian that was like a guardian deity, she was fighting the giant wolverine Marquis.

How was Aisha to stop those two?

She could not think of any good method. In any case, she would just go ahead and try. With determination in her heart, Aisha kept running across the plain of snow to approach the two Devil Kings.

Then she yelled in as loud a voice as she could muster.

"Please stop fighting, master! Same for you, dear elder sister Luo Hao!"

No response.

As Luo Hao's avatar, the Buddha Guardian executed a fierce spinning kick.

Kicked in the torso, the master's giant wolf form was sent flying. However, not much damage resulted. He had deliberately jumped sideways to escape the impact.

The giant wolf landing on four legs lightly was proof of that.

Furthermore, the giant wolf also released lightning from its jaws at the same time. In response, the Buddha Guardian raised its magical power greatly to resist the divine lightning's destructive force, dispelling it instead.

A back and forth battle between equals. Master and the dear elder sister only had eyes for each other, not looking at anything else at all.

"Please stop fightiiiiiiiiing~~~~!"

Still no response. They were not listening at all.

"Excuse me~~~~. Both of you stop fighting noooooooooow~~~~!"

The third time did not work either. Aisha felt disheartened. No helping it. Although it did not suit her personality, she had no choice but to resort to force.

"O queen of snakes, goddess of the sky, the earth and darkness. I beseech you to display a fearsome witch's countenance!"

Chanting spell words, she invoked her authority as the Queen of Winter.

Magical power and cold air, colorless and amorphous power entangled the

two fighting Devil Kings, restraining them. It was like a great serpent catching prey.

"Hmm!?"

"What on earth is this authority!?"

The giant wolf's body shook like a human's while Luo Hao also felt surprised.

However, it was too late. Completely fixated on the opponent in front of their eyes, the two Devil Kings were immobilized, ensnared by the "Queen of Winter's curse."

The gigantic gray wolf was currently captured by the equally gigantic Serpent of Ice.

The ice serpent's long body had wrapped itself tightly around the giant wolf's neck, body and limbs, restraining its movements. Furthermore, the giant wolf, *i.e.* Marquis Voban, was not the only one imprisoned.

Luo Hao's avatar, the Buddha Guardian was also suffering the same fate.

Another Serpent of Ice had suddenly appeared to attack her.

"Never did I expect—So this is your doing!?"

Luo Hao-oneesama finally gazed squarely at the nearby Aisha.

This Chinese woman had a strange habit of refusing to look straight at anyone no matter what. Even Aisha could only manage to enter a corner of her vision.

She was probably extremely shy, Aisha concluded. However, after a convoluted series of events, the two maidens were finally able to face each other directly.

"Actually, this is the truth, although I've hidden it till now."

At this moment, Aisha puffed out her chest.

"Like both of you, I am also someone with divine powers!"

"What nonsense—are you spouting..."

"Speaking of which, I have come across the following saying before. Excessive tragedies turn into comedies... Such a viewpoint exists in the west."

A voice of despair escaped from the Marquis' wolver jaws. On the other hand,

Onesama shook her head with a demeanor of sorrow.

Both of them were giving an aura of disbelief towards the reality in their face. Still maintaining his giant wolf form, Voban continued to speak: "However, many incomprehensible things finally have an explanation if she is a godslayer indeed. Still."

"I never expected you to be my peer... How impossible to accept."

The two Devil Kings were muttering with inexplicable defiance.

Currently, both of them were still restrained tightly by the Serpents of Ice, which did not simply bind enemies like a rope.

The ice serpents' bodies also released low-temperature cold air, trying to freeze the two Devil Kings solid.

The giant wolf, the Chinese beauty and her guardian deity—Their entire bodies were starting to freeze.

Capable of freezing even gods of myths and godslayers, this was a display of the Queen of Winter's greatness and harsh mercilessness.

At this rate, they were going to suffer hypothermia, causing necrosis all over the body. Frozen to death would be ultimate end.

Presumably sensing such an ominous future through instinct...

The two imprisoned godslayers exchanged inquiring glances then suddenly started to raise their magical power. The two of them carried this out virtually simultaneously.

They intended to increase their magical power to the max in order to resist the Queen of Winter's cursed shackles.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Hahhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"U-Umm, what is with you two suddenly? If you stop fighting and reconcile, I'll dispel the restraint spell, okay!?"

"Like anyone would do that!"

"Seriously, I shall break free of your restraints by my own power, then send you

and King Voban to the grave!"

"You stole my line. I, Voban, shall defeat that foolish girl and Cult Master Luo Hao!"

"H-Hold on! Please calm down, both of you~!"

Casting their dignity as Devil Kings to the wind, they were speaking like children.

Indeed. Ultimately, the ignorance and foolhardiness in daring to challenge gods was the personality characteristic common to the race known as godslayers.

Precisely because of that, foolish behavior was interconnected to their recklessness from those situations.

Whether Marquis Voban or Cult Master Luo Hao, they would be considered "old age" by the standards of ordinary people. However, they were still quite young for godslayers.

On the other hand, Aisha began to panic after seeing the two Devil Kings resist.

She was not used to fighting. In a direct fight against two angry Devil Kings, she would probably get defeated helplessly.

"Th-This is extremely baaaaaad~~~~!?"

The instant she panicked, she heard a whisper in her ear.

(Let's tell you something good.)

"I"

A young male voice. Aisha jumped in surprise.

(If say, you were to send them down—drag them below the surface, we might be able to take care of them.)

"Below the surface... You mean underground!?"

Aisha immediately nodded.

Despite suddenly hearing a suggestion from a weird voice, there was no time to doubt.

As one of those who would come to be named Campiones, Aisha also

possessed a disposition that could be called foolish and reckless, of course.

"This is surely a direction from fortune!"

Murmuring in complete trust, she instantly chanted spell words.

"O daughter of the goddess with beautiful hair—Hereby open the the palace of the earth."

"An earthquake... No!?"

"It is the power of an earth mother's... A goddess ruling over winter and death!"

Voban cried out while Luo Hao-oneesama was astonished.

Under the two Devil Kings' feet, a giant fissure suddenly opened up in the ground.

It was a fissure wide enough to completely swallow Marquis Voban, who had turned into a giant wolf, and Luo Hao-oneesama, who was leading a half-naked Buddha Guardian.

In addition, it was bottomless. This fissure led to the subterranean underworld.

The first deity Aisha had slain was the goddess Persephone.

She was a benevolent maiden of spring as well as the wife of Hades, the god of the underworld. Whenever winter came, she would descend to the subterranean underworld to become the cruel queen of death.

Aisha's authority possessed the trump card named [Underworld Descent] which exhibited her two-sided nature.

Currently, the two Devil Kings who had become the sacrifices were falling into the fissure—underground. However, things did not proceed that smoothly.

"Hmph. Petty trick!"

"It would be wishful thinking if you believe that I lack a flying technique!"

Voban released his giant wolf transformation while falling and summoned a storm.

He intended to return to a human's light body and use wind to carry himself to

the surface. Meanwhile, Luo Hao-oneesama was using an even simpler method.

She unsummoned her defender, the Buddha Guardian, and prepared to ascend rapidly with a flying spell.

—Normally speaking, just falling into a fissure of [Underworld Descent] would already be enough to cause the body to enter a state of suspended animation.

However, the two of them had raised their magical power to the max earlier to resist the restraints of Aisha's ice serpents. Hence, that was probably why they could withstand it.

"I-I need something to push them down."

Thinking that, Aisha had a stroke of inspiration.

Something suitable happened to be sitting in her apron pocket. The three-pronged rod of steel, what she had picked up by chance earlier.

In fact, she had sensed it was an extremely dangerous tool when she picked it up.

Following her intuition, she poured all her magical power into the steel rod and tossed it into the ground fissure with a "hey!" The three-pronged rod started to crackle with released electricity.

This lightning of maximum power happened to strike the two Devil Kings who were trying to fly up to the ground surface. The ice serpents' cursed restraints, Underworld Descent, plus this strike of divine lightning.

"The three-pronged vajra!?"

"Haste!"

The two Devil Kings were able to withstand these multiple attacks, just barely, probably because they both possessed quite a terrifying amount of magical power.

Especially Cult Master Luo Hao. She swiftly pulled the three-pronged rod to her using Daoist arts and caught it in her hand.

Held in Luo Hao-oneesama's hand, the rod finally stopped emitting electricity and quieted down.

But at this moment, a fearsome attractive force was generated from the depths of Aisha's ground fissure. It was a power of universal attraction, dragging everything to the bottom of the earth.

Even the atmosphere above ground was getting sucked in, resulting in powerful wind flowing towards the bottom of the fissure.

"!?"

Marquis Voban and Luo Hao-oneesama were both stunned.

Helplessly imprisoned by the by attractive force, they had no choice but to fall into the earth's depths.

Due to suffering Aisha's multiple attacks (?), they were probably too preoccupied to resist the attractive force.

As a side note, speaking of the perpetrator—

"Oh dear? What kind of god will appear this time?"

Aisha felt quite puzzled by a phenomenon that did not stem from her own authority.

Furthermore, she was immediately caught by the attractive force too.

"Kyahhhh!"

Swallowed by the fissure she had created herself, she fell down.

Moreover, this attractive force did not pull the three Campiones to the subterranean underworld. Instead it transported them to another world— It was slightly later when they realized this.

Part 9

"Owww..."

Aisha was supposed to fall to the bottom of the earth but she found herself lying on grassland by the time she came to her senses.

Joints all over her body were aching. However, that was all. She had apparently not suffered any heavy injuries such as fractures. Compared to falling to the subterranean underworld, this would be no more than a scratch...

"Oh my oh my, goodness."

Instantly pushing herself up, Aisha exclaimed.

A vast expanse of "spring" stretched before her eyes. Flourishing vegetation exhibited hydrated greenery with leaves glistening from morning dew. Adorable flowers were blooming in various colors all over the place.

A wilderness as far as the eye could see.

No homes nearby. Not even a single man-made structure.

"What a beautiful place... But how did I come to this kind of place?"

Aisha stood up and made a few rounds in the area. A mild breeze was blowing against her skin, tickling her.

The sunlight falling from the eastern sky was also warm and pleasing. It was a comfortable environment where one would even hope to remain here forever.

Clearly she should be in the metropolis of London in midwinter, so what exactly was going on?

Although Marquis Voban's mansion was definitely surrounded by a countryside filled with nature, after the onslaught of such a powerful blizzard, it should be quite far from this scene of spring.

While Aisha was puzzling...

"Onee-san, looks like it's okay now."

A cute male voice spoke to her.

She had heard the same voice during the fight between Marquis Voban and Oneesama.

Aisha shifted her gaze to see a tiny person walking towards her, only ten inches (roughly twenty-five centimeters) tall. Roughly ten years old if judge by human appearances, he looked quite young.

He was dressed in green with a pointed hat.

Rather than a single boy of such a description, there were a total of seven of them.

"Could it have been you guys?"

Aisha stopped down and looked at the boys' faces.

"Did you transport me here?"

"Rather than us."

"Actually, it's our boss. The queen of the land of fairies."

"Just as you can see, we are fairies."

"We were captured by that evil Devil King geezer."

Evil Devil King. They probably meant Marquis Voban. Realizing that, Aisha smiled slightly wryly.

Meanwhile, the seven tiny people continued to talk all at once.

"That mage working for him said something about 'research.'"

"Using us."

"We've been waiting the whole time for a chance to escape."

"Then we saw you guys fighting. There'd no more chances if we missed this one, so we prayed to the Lord of Fairies."

"Please open a portal to the fairy realm."

"However, we can't summon the portal to the surface by our power, so we

asked you to smash the ground."

"Then the underground portal sucked in everyone."

After listening to the gist of things, Aisha figured out the situation.

Just like the three-pronged rod, this was probably destiny brought by the luck authority. Thanks to that, she had overcome that predicament.

"Then where did that lady, the one who was fighting master—the evil Devil King—go?"

"Where eh?"

"Like you, should be somewhere in the fairy realm."

Aisha's current location was apparently a world known as the "fairy realm." Since she was fine, master and Oneesama were surely unharmed.

While thinking that, Aisha thought of other ideas.

Given this rare chance to visit the fairy realm, she might as well go traveling in this world.

Also, the seven tiny fairies also seemed to be encouraging her.

"Hey, Onee-san. Would you like to visit the fairy city together?"

"It's where our queen lives."

"Ordinary people can't go there."

"We'll lead the way for you."

"Eh, really? Then thank you so much. I am so happy!"

Aisha accepted this unexpected suggestion.

This fairy realm was what humans called the Astral Plane or the Netherworld.

It was a place ruled by several gods known as the Lords of Fairies. Furthermore, it was the mysterious domain where "a being who used to be a Heretic God" lived in seclusion.

Furthermore, the seven tiny people who had invited Aisha were definitely not benevolent fairies.

In fact, they belonged to an evil race of black dwarves. To kill the seemingly stupid godslayer, whom they had discovered by chance, as a sacrifice, they intended to deceive from the start.

At the place where they took her, Aisha encountered the queen of the fairy realm.

Then after a convoluted series of events, "the authority to open fairy portals" finally fell into the hands of Devil King Aisha... But that would be a separate tale.

Also, Aisha had received several effects of good luck from invoking her authority earlier.

By the time she realized the price of that was an encounter with evil fairies, she had already been caught up in a vortex of commotions.

Ultimately, the power to bring sudden fortune was likewise capable of summoning abrupt misfortune and disaster, thus maintaining a balance between them.

But back then, Aisha was still an inexperienced girl of seventeen.

Hence, she was completely oblivious to this fact.

Part 10

Time went by, arriving at the year 1860.

The night of the blizzard with three godslayers gathered in one spot had happened many years ago.

Dejanstahl Voban desperately wished to forget that memory, but was unable to wipe it from his mind no matter what.

Simply encountering a peer—a godslayer—was already rare enough. In addition, both of the two he had met back then left with him with deep impressions.

Especially the Indian godslayer named Aisha. It was an unacceptable blunder for him to have failed to discern her identity.

Most likely, the same applied to Cult Master Luo Hao of the Chinese martial realm in addition to himself.

However, there was probably no helping it. To think that girl with apparent mental problems could be a godslayer, totally impossible to imagine no matter what...

Every time he persuaded himself in this manner, he always felt an impulse to click his tongue.

As a side note, after "being had" by Aisha's authority back then, Marquis Voban and Cult Master Luo Hao were both dragged into the Astral Plane.

Voban went through several adventures after that before finally returning to the real world.

Cult Master Luo Hao probably returned in a similar fashion. Or perhaps using some kind of planewalking magic, she might have returned to the real world directly. Voban had frequently heard rumors about her from China.

However, he had not heard any news of that Aisha girl.

"Did she die in battle somewhere?"

After muttering that, Voban shook his head with troubled thoughts.

A gentle girl of that sort was not suited to being a godslayer. Although he did not know if she was in this world or the Astral Plane, either way, she was surely living a carefree life somewhere.

"No matter. I do not wish to meet her again. I probably won't get involved with her ever again."

Saying that, he intended to forget this incident.

Ever since, "Marquis Voban" also changed how he lived.

Weary of settled life in London, he was now moving between major cities across the land. Berlin, Paris, Barcelona, *etc.* There were as many exciting places to live in as he wanted. Accompanying industrial development, the many cities of Europe's major powers were undergoing earthshaking changes.

Speaking of change, the world of magic was also changing.

Marquis Voban had paid Buckingham Palace a visit on a whim in the past.

Due to this incident, the magi of London had apparently assembled an organization known as the Witenagemot. Reportedly, it operated under the banner of defending the queen from the evil reaches of violent godslayers. At its core was apparently a secret club of old magi known as the Diogenes Club.

Also, Campione.

An Italian who had served a godslayer in the past published a paper.

Reportedly, his paper recorded details on Devil Kings who had slain gods and usurped their authorities—Revolutionary content on what kinds of beings they were.

The royal title of "Campione" was to be offered to these Devil Kings, deserving of fear and reverence.

This paper proved to be unexpectedly influential. Lately, Voban had been increasingly called a Campione.

"Oh well, it is true indeed."

Smiling with delight, Voban shrugged.

"It's much more concise than Lord of Magi."

He was currently enjoying a long vacation. Not only leaving his city of residence but even Europe as well, he had arrived at Africa's eastern shore.

On the deck of steam-powered ship, he was leaning against a guardrail, enjoying the sea breeze.

Sailing from Cape Town, the ship was proceeding smoothly along the Zambezi River. This all began with an emergency report from Viscount Gerard, who had heard a certain rumor.

'There is a valley in the depths of the mountains upstream of the Zambezi River. A place featuring many caves, legends tell of people inheriting primordial magic who have even built a small kingdom there. I heard that several months earlier, an Englishman who had gotten lost and reached that place... met a goddess there.'

'She had otherworldly beauty and even possessed mysterious powers.'

'Everyone injured... Even those on the verge of death would be healed just by her offering a prayer. Perhaps because of that, the kingdom's people all regard her as a goddess. They would do everything in their power to fulfill her requests no matter what. If it were for her sake, they would even die gladly...'

'The man who reported this should still be in London, but while speaking with a rapturous expression, he expressed his wish to see the goddess again, even if only for one more glimpse.'

'Hey Dejan, perhaps that Heretic Goddess might descend once more!'

It would not be bad entertainment to confirm the veracity of this report while on vacation anyway.

Due to this notion on whim, Voban was currently heading on a journey to the land of Africa.

If all went well, perhaps he might be able to fight a goddess somewhere. Also, one might add as a digression—Two weeks later, the European Campione would

come to learn of a truth he had no wish to know.

The place upstream of the Zambezi River did not have a goddess. Instead, it was actually his old acquaintance, a girl.

She rejoiced at their reunion with a smile no different from several years ago. However, her authorities had already evolved in a more disturbing direction than several years ago.

Furthermore, he was painfully aware that in a certain sense, this girl was his true nemesis.

While enjoying a journey by ship, the young Marquis Voban immersed himself in thoughts of the never encountered foe waiting for him somewhere out there in the world—

Chapter 10 - The Eve of Civil War

The hero of salvation, the king manifesting at era's end.

His true name was finally revealed as Ramachandra. Half a day had passed since Kusanagi Godou last experienced a series of deathmatches against this man, whose name was abbreviated as Rama.

It was currently after midnight. The date had rolled over on the calendar.

After taking out his cellphone to check the time, Godou slowly began to speak:

"My body is fine now... I'm heading back."

"Huh?"

Reacting in surprise to his words was Liliana Kranjcar.

The location was a luxury apartment located in Tokyo's special ward of Bunkyo.

Godou was currently in the living room of this apartment together with Liliana. However, Godou had been lying in bed earlier, resting his body that was on the verge of death after the intense battle against Rama.

More precisely, it was a state of suspended animation.

Nevertheless, he had now recovered to a state of full health after sleeping for several hours.

This was due to using Verethragna's eighth incarnation, the [Ram].

His clothing, soiled and tattered from battle, had already been changed. Furthermore, now that his body was fine, Godou decided he had better get home as soon as possible.

"Since it is so late already, why not stay the night here? Your body had just been skewered during the daytime."

"Yeah, but my body really is fine now."

"Although I believe you, I am certain you must be exhausted after battle. Please have a good rest here until morning."

This was a very common sense suggestion in the style of a very loyal and serious female knight. Nevertheless, Godou had other thoughts which he deemed more necessary to respect.

"Yeah, but since it's Erica's... Staying over at a girl's home is a problem too."

"It is not as though you two were alone. Besides, there are additional spare rooms. Seishuun Ena and I both intend to stay here too."

"You're weakening my resolve if you keep saying stuff like that."

To be honest, his body and mind were definitely quite exhausted. Godou really wanted to get to bed as quickly as possible and sleep for three days and three nights just like that.

Be that as it may, Godou still said the following:

"If I go back in the morning, Shizuka might make a huge fuss again. I'd better go home quietly and sleep in my own bed."

"Indeed, it is quite like you to care more about your relationship with your sister than the fate of the world."

Liliana sighed.

"However, please allow me to speak as your knight and housekeeper."

Eventually, when Kusanagi Godou established his own house as a "Devil King," only someone talented as Liliana Kranjcar would be capable of managing the household as his adjutant, adviser and housekeeper.

Thus, the girl of this caliber declared in a nagging tone of voice:

"If you were to insist on returning home... Erica and I will use magic to lock this room, to imprison you within. Please give up on escaping. Rest properly on this bed until morning."

"Imprisonment is such a scary description."

"Cast all needless worries aside. Why not forget your prided immortal body

and let yourself be treated like a human?"

Liliana's half-joking suggestion brought a wry smile to Godou's face.

Since she had said this out of benevolent intentions, he still felt grateful. Just as Godou was thinking of taking her advice...

There was a very polite knocking at the door. "Please enter," Liliana answered.

"Pardon the intrusion. May I ask if you are feeling better now, Godou-san?"

"Although Liliana keeps telling me to rest properly, I'm pretty much fine."

A woman roughly twenty years old entered.

Arianna Hayama Arial di. A member of the magic association, the [Copper Black Cross], this black-haired beauty also served as Erica's personal assistant.

The majority of her work fell under a maid's duties. Currently, she was also wearing a maid's apron dress.

Then at this moment, during the instant when the door was shut...

Godou sensed a rather inauspicious presence.

Rather, he smelled it. A strange odor, slightly provocative, wafting in slightly from outside the door. An ordinary person might have failed to notice it, but for a Devil King Campione's sharpened five senses, this was quite sufficient as a signal for danger.

However, in contrast to that kind of warning sign, Arianna-san spoke cheerfully:

"Not at all. Didn't you receive very serious injuries today? You should rest for tonight until the next day. Otherwise, it would be bad if you ruined your health."

This was the second time someone advised Godou after he had left the bed and was already changed.

Ultimately, it was hard to talk back when even an older lady told him to stay. Even Godou had to back down. Arianna-san continued: "Oh right. Erica-sama left a message."

"Message?"

"Yes. She said she had to go out after receiving an urgent call from members of the association. She might not be returning tonight and would like you to go to bed first."

Erica was very busy normally. From what Godou heard, she sometimes had to go out very late at night to meet people involved with magic. Especially tonight, which was not long after the "King of the End" had appeared. Perhaps that was why she had been called out.

"Furthermore, Seishuun-sama has already left to attend to matters of her own."

"Even she left huh?"

"I heard it was necessary for her to convene with someone from the History Compilation Committee."

Someone from the Committee—Perhaps Sayanomiya Kaoru.

Since the heart of the incident occurred in the Kantou region, the History Compilation Committee ought to be even busier than Erica and the others. Hence, there was nothing strange about this.

Godou had a more pressing question to clear up, so he asked:

"Got it. Putting that aside, Anna-san, could it be that you're currently... cooking something?"

"Indeed, nothing escapes you, Godou-san. I was thinking you must be tired from your battle during the daytime, so I prepared a midnight snack. Using secret ingredients passed down the association, it is special soup for clearing away all kinds of fatigue instantly—"

Upon hearing this terrifying confession, Godou immediately motioned with his eyes.

Naturally, the target was the silver-haired female knight.

Several months prior, on that night when the ingredient known as bear meat was delivered to her from the mountains of Chichibu, Miss Arianna had exhibited an abundance of unique innovation in pot-stewed cuisine.

Apparently recalling the events of that night, Liliana immediately spoke up.

"It is quite a shame, but Kusanagi Godou is about to set off. If he does not return home tonight, his sister Shizuka-san will be worried."

"Oh dear, is that so? In that case, regarding the midnight snack, Liliana-sama, how about you and I—"

"F-Furthermore, I must accompany him as his bodyguard! So that is what is happening. I think it is almost time to depart. Thank you for looking after us on all accounts!"

Soup that could clear away all kinds of fatigue.

Its effects must surely be extraordinary. However, all would be lost if the soup even cleared away one's consciousness and health.

Hence, ten-odd minutes later...

"What a close call just now..."

"Anna-san's pot-stewed cooking is truly terrifying..."

Godou and Liliana were currently walking in Bunkyou's Nezu area along the streets at night.

Late night in February. Sure enough, the winter season's stars looked prettier. However, there were drawbacks too, of course.

"It's almost March and yet the air is still so cold..."

"However, it is slightly reassuring. If Prince Rama were still around, the night would probably feel warmer..."

"Now that you mention it, that's true."

Godou nodded at what Liliana had pointed out.

Turning into the ultimate warrior through the Grand Ritual of the Covenant, Ramachandra caused the air temperature in the surrounding region to rise rapidly "simply through his existence."

Accelerating global warming simply by hanging around, he was a being that pushed the world towards destruction.

And precisely because of that, he was known as "the king manifesting at era's

end"...

He was reputed to be the mortal enemy of all Campiones. However, Godou did not bear any resentment towards him. Recalling that handsome face evocative of rust, Godou shook his head.

He no longer had any wish to fight such a ridiculously strong foe.

He no longer had any wish to fight such a likable man.

Recalling that man who was impossible to call a mortal enemy based on that double significance, Godou said to his loyal knight: "I'm sorry for making you accompany me this late. Let me see you off at your home, Liliana."

"Please do not say such silly things. I am the one serving as the bodyguard. It is my responsibility to accompany you to your doorstep."

"But it's a bit bad to be escorted home by a girl."

"I am not doing this as a girl but as part of a knight's duty."

Erica's luxury apartment was located quite close to the Kusanagi residence and Liliana's home.

All were easily reachable on foot. As a side note, this quiet neighborhood retained much of the trappings of *Shitamachi*, the lowlying and traditional area of Tokyo, and did not have late-night loiterers no matter the hour of the day.

Although it was not a dangerous place, there were virtually no pedestrians passing by on the streets either.

Walking along this kind of path, Liliana's expression changed abruptly. For some reason, she suddenly started fidgeting shyly.

"What's wrong, Liliana?"

"Oh, nothing..."

After murmuring that, she suddenly leaned in close.

That was not all. She even took Godou's left arm and started walking nonchalantly, arm in arm.

"!?"

"Because it is cold... This is necessary. It is also my duty as a knight."

"A-As a knight?"

"Yes. Hence, please do not say anything and just let us continue like this."

"S-Sure."

Liliana hugged Godou's left arm tightly.

Naturally, this felt warmer. Furthermore, this type of intimate contact would bring certain feelings of reassurance and fulfillment to the heart.

Not limited to Godou, Liliana probably felt the same.

By the way...

How many times exactly had they engaged in this type of behavior under the pretext of lord and knight?

This type of atmosphere would only arise when Godou was spending time alone with Liliana. Clearly it felt so embarrassing but it also fostered a unique mood that would ignite the pair's passion.

Arm in arm, the two of them walked through streets at night.

By the time they realized, they had already arrived at the shopping street where the Kusanagi residence was located.

Godou could immediately get home just by entering this street. However, he looked into Liliana's eyes. As though wanting to tell him something, Liliana looked at him in return.

"I'd like... to stroll for a bit longer."

"W-What a coincidence. The same goes for me, actually."

Thus, the two of them did not enter the shopping street at Nezu's Area 3.

As a result, they walked along the outskirts of Nezu Shrine's neighborhood and even reached the vicinity of Dangozaka in Sendagi. Of course, they walked arm in arm the whole time.

Along the way, they bought warm green tea and milk tea at a convenience store.

After exiting the store, they naturally entwined their arms together again and resumed walking.

Entering a small park, they sat down on a bench and pulled the ring off their drink cans. Thus, they took a break under this kind of cold sky— "Speaking of which, things were so rushed during the daytime that there was no time to confirm."

Liliana slowly began to speak.

"Umm... You returned successfully from the Netherworld with the spell words to slice Prince Rama apart. Mariya Yuri and Seishuuin Ena were the ones who accompanied you—"

"Y-Yeah."

Sensing the warning signs of danger again, Godou slightly raised the pitch of his voice. As expected, Liliana happened to pinpoint the most harrowing issue.

"In other words, sure enough, the one you did it with—"

"Oh come on! Who cares about this kind of thing, right!?"

"I see. A far-out possibility simply occurred to me... Both together, was it?"

"!?"

Godou was stunned, staring at Liliana with eyes that inquired "Why ask this?"

Hence, the questioner with the keen intuition sighed then spoke in a voice of exasperation.

"To be honest, I was merely fishing for an answer from you."

"Eh!?"

"It is already sufficient. Despite my wishful thinking, hoping it was not actually true, you easily took the bait. Then it probably proceeded in the usual manner, right?"

"....."

"However, Kusanagi Godou, you are obliged to take responsibility."

"Obliged?"

Suddenly, Liliana changed her tone of voice.

Her tone changed from a strict knight's to that of a sulking girl.

"Yes. Did you know? In religions permitting polygyny, there exists such a commandment. Thou shalt confer equal love to all wives."

"....."

"Then today, you did that with the two HimeMikos. Furthermore, if my hunch is correct... Several days prior, while tracking down Sir Salvatore, you spent a night alone with Erica at Sardinia. Perhaps that time as well—"

Liliana was speaking quietly in an accusatory tone, demanding to be coddled in a slightly excessive manner.

The two of them were sitting on a park bench late at night, staring intently into each other's eyes. Godou could touch her body again with just a simple reach of his arm.

"I hate being the only one left out."

"Liliana."

"Ah!"

Of course, he could not remain unmoved now that she had said this much.

Without a moment's delay, he suddenly pulled the female knight's delicate body over to him, sitting her on top of his lap. Then gazing in her beautiful face that was like a fairy's, he drew his lips near.

Naturally, Liliana instantly closed her eyes.

Their lips made contact.

With smooching sounds, the surface membranes of lips entangled together, exchanging saliva between them.

It was not limited to lips. Their tongues also sucked, licked, and savored each other intimately, fully indulging in the pleasures of a deep and passionate kiss.

During this time, Godou embraced Liliana's body tightly in his arms.

Although the girl sitting on his lap definitely did not have a voluptuous figure,

the tactile sensation was extraordinarily comfortable. Furthermore, hers was a very feminine and supple body.

Simply hugging this body of hers was enough to bring indescribable pleasure.

Liliana also embraced Godou tightly in return.

While Godou was sucking her lips in a fierce kiss, she responded with even more intensity in her tongue movements and hugged him even harder.

After kissing like this for several minutes, the two of them finally separated their lips from each other.

Although they had paused for one or two minutes in the middle, in the end, they still found it difficult to breathe. To regulate their quickened breathing, they panted heavily.

Since it was a chilly night, their exhaled breaths were white.

"Umm... However, perhaps I might be disqualified as a knight if I speak like this."

Liliana murmured with eyes of rapture.

They could continue their kiss at a moment's notice. That was how close apart they were while gazing at each other.

"I hope you would not go home tonight. I want... to stay with you forever."

"I don't feel the same way... I'd be lying if I said that."

After whispering to each other, they burst out chuckling at the same time.

Whether Godou or Liliana, both were in exceptionally heightened emotions desiring each other.

"How about my place?"

"Sounds good—Uh, Liliana."

Suddenly coming to his senses, Godou asked.

"Uh, umm, your place, well, isn't Karen there?"

"Oh... Indeed, that is true."

Karen Jankulovski was Liliana's personal maid and junior witch.

Godou recalled the girl who lived in Liliana's home. Extremely wise in the ways of the world despite being teenager, she was also highly inquisitive and loved to play pranks on others.

Remembering Karen, who was not easy to handle, the two of them calmed down.

"....."

"....."

"Time to go home, I guess."

"Indeed. It would be best to call it a day."

Godou felt reluctant to part yet was okay with it at the same time. Feeling such subtle emotions, Godou muttered and Liliana concurred wryly.

"Oh right, I almost forgot this."

Liliana suddenly searched her pocket and took out a black arrowhead.

An arrowhead crafted from steel. Unassuming at first glance, it was actually exuding a hair-raising aura of calamity. It was the gift from the Princess of Glass upon his departure from the Netherworld.

"You were carrying this. Could this be..."

Recovering her keen intuition as a female knight, Liliana wondered.

"The same item as the arrowhead we saw in ancient Gaul? Capable of rendering a Campione unconscious despite their resilient bodies, used in Prince Rama's poison arrows—"

"Yeah. I actually received it in the Netherworld. I'm told it might come in handy."

"!"

Liliana felt shocked. How sharp she was.

She could instantly imagine how such an object would be "handy." Godou nodded at his loyal knight and spoke with a sigh.

"A conflict is probably going to erupt between us Campiones next. It's going to

be a contest to see who gets the right to fight Rama alone."

The observation deck on the Tokyo Skytree...

Here, Luo Cuilian was looking out to the rising sun.

A night had passed since the battle against King Rama and his faction, thus bringing morning. Rather than waking up early on purpose, this was her usual time to rise daily.

It was said that the Yang energy released at the beginning of sunrise was the purest.

In order to absorb this Yang energy, she intentionally chose this hour of the day to practice *neigong*, a set of Chinese breathing, meditation and spiritual disciplines.

Looking out at this scenery from 350m above the ground, the sacred sun could be seen rising slowly in the eastern sky. A most magnificent sight, one might say.

Flying by her own power, Luo Cuilian could cruise at such an altitude no matter when.

Even without constructing such a massive tower on purpose, she could view such a rising sun any time she wanted.

"To think they would go out of their way to construct such a thing for an overlooking view of the city... How inexorably foolish."

"Indeed. You are quite correct, Master."

Attending to her was Luo Cuilian's one and only direct disciple, Lu Yinghua.

Whenever in his master's company, he had to practice *neigong* together with her at the break of dawn. This was an unwritten rule between master and disciple.

As a side note, there were also a number of similar high-rise towers located in the Greater China circle under Luo Cuilian's rule. Naturally, there was no need to report on every trivial detail of this sort.

"By the way, my young eagle, I have a task for you."

"Your wish is my command, Master. Please instruct your disciple Lu Yinghua."

"All Devil Kings apart from me, their whereabouts, their movements... Inform all subordinates in the Holy Cult to report such information back to me in exhaustive detail."

"Understood."

"The one who needs to be investigated in the greatest detail is... That witch. Madame Aisha."

Answering "affirmative," Lu Yinghua felt slightly surprised.

There was currently a total of seven Campiones ruling the earth. Among them, Madame Aisha was undoubtedly the weakest in combat power.

Naturally, the horrifying thing about Devil Kings was that they could not be predicted so easily like this.

However, for the peerless Luo Cuilian to deem her as the one to be the most wary of... Reading Lu Yinghua's expression of surprise, the beautiful Cult Master spoke: "That witch is far more dangerous and troublesome than you imagine. She has already created hardship for me a number of times..."

"Master, she has forced you into dire straits before? And more than once!?"

"Yes. Although it is part of a past I have no wish to recall, I cannot deny it. After all, strife is about to begin."

"Strife—against Madame Aisha?"

"No, strife involving all godslayers as opponents."

Feeling an urge to scream in shock, Lu Yinghua took everything in his power to suppress it.

He must not embarrass himself in front of Luo Cuilian at all costs. Instead, he nodded with a resolute expression and asked indifferently: "In that case, will you take the approach of cooperation with Honored Uncle?"

"Regarding this matter... I have devoted much contemplation. Indeed, it would be a wonderful battle for sworn siblings to join forces and defeat common enemies."

For some unknown reason, a shadow of worry surfaced on Luo Cuilian's beautiful face.

"Nevertheless, if the sworn sister were to obstruct the younger brother on purpose, leading to an all-out battle with no holds barred, an even more fortified and beautiful bond could be forged between the two of us. Such a concept exists too."

"Huh?"

Hearing these completely unexpected words, Lu Yinghua's entire body froze. For a promising young star of the martial realm, he made a slightly pathetic sound.

"In other words, Master will become Honored Uncle's enemy?"

"Of course. Rather than waste a thousand words, an exchange of pummeling blows would be preferable. This is how more of one's thoughts can be transmitted from one person to another. He will surely be moved to tears, understanding beyond a shred of doubt the sworn sister's love, more bountiful than the ocean."

"...The result of mutual opposition also includes the possibility of Honored Uncle dying in battle."

"Indeed, that is possible. Be that as it may, this is the fight to determine who is eligible to fight King Rama."

Luo Cuilian smiled and started to imagine the upcoming conflict.

"Should he lose his life on the path of battle, one would have no choice but to conclude that outcome as his limit. There is no need for unnecessary worries."

The greatest civil war between the seven Devil King Campiones was about to begin in the near future.

In a certain sense, the most formidable foe, no less than Prince Rama, was standing in Kusanagi Godou's way—The warning sign had already appeared.



Afterword

Dear readers, the series has finally reached its 18th volume.

I am truly grateful for all the readers who have stayed for the ride so far.

Although the previous 17 volumes were all published under the Super Dash Bunko label, starting this volume, *Campione!* has been transferred to Dash X Bunko.

As a result, the cover features a two-sided design.

The outside is the Dash X Bunko version while the inside is the Super Dash Bunko cover as before, thus allowing us to keep using the existing design.

...Personally, I keep thinking "by this juncture, why not stay in Super Dash the whole time?" (wry smile) I was told that transferring in this strange manner was due to various considerations including circulation numbers.

This is all thanks to your loving support as always, dear readers.

For this, let me express my gratitude again.

So, this volume is composed of short stories released in various channels, the drama CD script, plus newly written content.

Chapter 1 - The HimeMikos and the Seventh Campione - First released: bonus booklet bundled with TSUTAYA purchase

Chapter 2 - The King's Dinner Party - First released: WEB special

Chapter 3 - Campione and Study Meeting - First released: WEB special

Chapter 4 - The King's Game - First released: WEB special

Chapter 5 - The Kusanagi Family's Parttime Job - First released: bonus booklet with simultaneous purchase of Volume 15 and Manga Volume 2

Chapter 6 - A Meeting of Men(?) on a Certain Day - First released: WEB special

Chapter 7 - Various Reminiscences - First released: WEB special

Chapter 8 - Kusanagi Godou and the Monster of Okutama - First released: as drama CD bundled with magazine

Chapter 9 - A Gathering of Godslayers in the Fog Capital - New content

Chapter 10 - The Eve of Civil War - New content

First, let's talk about Chapters 1 to 8.

These short stories took place in the narrative from September in the first year to January in the following year.

Also, the first chapter, a bonus booklet bundled with a TSUTAYA purchase as well as serving as an introduction to the series, was released right before the anime's broadcast run. Hence, it's a short story with "What is a Campione?" as the theme.

The booklet used for Chapter 5 in this volume was the *Campione! Limited Book* given as a gift to people who bought Volume 15 and Manga Volume 2 simultaneously, which was after the anime ended.

These series of short stories were constructed with the protagonist's daily life as a central theme... Precisely because of that, they serve to accentuate how completely unordinary he is.

As a side note, when I was conceptualizing Kusanagi Godou as a character, before writing Volume 1, I referenced many prominent figures in Chinese literature, such as Sun Wukong from *Journey to the West*, "Black Tornado" Li Kui from *Outlaws of the Marsh*, etc.

Oh well, basically characters who don't have many laudable traits in their personalities (wry smile).

Furthermore, I also included elements from a character known as "The Hypocritical Gentleman" in the works of the great Chinese martial arts novelist, Jin Yong.

Inspired by these sources, I added the personality of the self-proclaimed pacifist, thus the character of Kusanagi Godou was born.

Given a character with such a background, I was definitely expecting all the

readers to ridicule him as "a bastard who only speaks pretty words!"

But even a guy like that was able to receive a voice when animated.

The choice of voice actor was first announced with the release of the drama CD produced as the first step in promoting the anime. It was bundled with the *SUPER DASH & GO* magazine where *Campione!*'s manga adaptation was serialized.

The script of that story is now collected in this volume.

It was an episode about "defeating a centipede monster" that was also mentioned in Volume 15.

Since it was a story I thought up a long time ago, all I needed to do as the author was place it within the timeline... But due to its nature as a bundled bonus item, acquiring the CD is now quite difficult.

Readers who never had a chance to listen to this CD will have a chance to find out the story here.

During recording, as the scriptwriter, I discussed with the editor in charge at Shueisha, the anime producer and the drama CD's sound director while asking the voice actors to show some "improvisational" acting skills and make adjustments to the dialogue accordingly.

Readers who own the CD might find it interesting to compare with the script. If you do that, you'll be able to see what changes were made according to "judgment on the spot."

Also, let me talk about the now massively popular Matsuoka Yoshitsugu-san who was cast as Godou.

Not only did he perform zealously in every episode of the anime, but he was also able to bring out profound dialogue. In many ways, he really looked after me a lot.

So that's that.

The mid-length Chapter 9 and the final short story are newly written.

In the 1850s, three Campiones were gathered in London when Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson were still in infancy. The combination of characters featured in this story was already decided even before they appeared in the main series.

Merely for the Marquis and Her Eminence to show up already makes the story nothing simple (laugh).

However, there is also *her*, who adds "zest and spice" to the story (actually unnecessarily).

In fact, she is the most special character even among the seven Campiones and also exists as a comedic character.

The "Civil War between Devil Kings" will begin next volume.

The disturbance in 19th century London was actually a preliminary skirmish heralding the war that was to come much later.

While troubling over how to handle the "bomb" that is Madame Aisha, the rest of the Campiones will face the eruption of unprecedented internal strife.

The stage is Japan. Kusanagi Godou will confront the most vicious of enemies.

If it pleases you, it would be my greatest honor if you could continue to read the next volume, dear readers.

Translator's Notes and References

1. [↑](#) **Hamaguri-ba**(蛤刃): A description for Japanese blades, describing one that is thick all along the blade. See [diagram](#) of cross-section.
2. [↑](#) **Doutanuki**(同田貫): the name of a school of swordsmiths from feudal Japan whose swords were renowned for their superior cutting ability.[\[1\]](#)
3. [↑](#) **Seiwa Genji**(清和源氏): the most successful and powerful line of the Japanese Minamoto clan that were descended from Emperor Seiwa, featuring many famous warriors.[\[2\]](#)
4. [↑](#) **Izakaya**(居酒屋): a Japanese drinking establishment that serves food to go with the drinks, often visited for after-work casual drinking.
5. [↑](#) **Cee-lo**: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cee-lo>
6. [↑](#) **Horatius Cocles**: Publius Horatius Cocles was an army officer of the ancient Roman Republic, famous during the war between Rome and Clusium during the 6th century BCE.[\[3\]](#)
7. [↑](#) **Miyamoto Musashi**(宮本 武蔵): a Japanese swordsman renowned for his excellent swordsmanship in numerous duels since a very young age.[\[4\]](#)
8. [↑](#) Revelation 2:10
9. [↑](#) *Farewell to Dong Da*(别董大), by the Chinese poet Gao Shi(高適) from the Tang dynasty.
10. [↑](#) *A River Scene in Snow*(江雪), by the Chinese poet Liu Zongyuan(柳宗元) from the Tang dynasty.